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SPIRIT POSSESSION: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF THE TEXTUAL
TRADITION IN ISLAM

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Humanities

By

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2012
Wright State University

WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY
GRADUATE SCHOOL

March 13, 2012

I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER
MY SUPERVISION BY Megan Renee Werth ENTITLED Spirit
Possession: Exploring the Role of the Textual Tradition in Islam BE
ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
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ABSTRACT

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This investigation focuses on locally specific manifestations of spirit possession found in Muslim societies throughout the world. Though allegedly founded on the same textual traditions, historians and anthropologists have observed that ‘popular’ and ‘orthodox’ Islamic practices have given rise to seemingly multiple, religiously inspired responses to societies’ problems and to a variety of ritual acts. In spite of the numerous practices documented by scholars, a hidden narrative emerges, that Islamic spirit possession practices, whether licit or illicit, represent a phenomenon of tandem development between two distinct authorities, coexisting within a greater Islamic worldview. Muslims must deal with it in one way or another, due to a shared belief that spirit possession is an illness prevents the host and society from fully worshiping Allah. With this in mind, this study also addresses one aspect of the wider question about the relationship between the textual tradition and popular religious experience.

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I. ISLAMIC SPIRIT POSSESSION AND THE COMPLEXITIES TO ITS STUDY

The *Qur'an* is at the core of Islamic worldview and represents the foundation of Islamic textual traditions. The *Hadiths*, the *Sunna of the Prophet* and *books of the Imams*, thought by many Muslims to be outgrowths of the words of the *Qur'an*, are also central to the construction of their worldview. Parallel textual traditions emerged with the development of the major Islamic denominations like Sunni and Shi'a, and with Sufism; followers derived their scholarly leadership from the *Ulama*, who often have divergent interpretations of an allegedly unified set of principles. The textual traditions have had a powerful effect on the determiner's ritual actions, whether officially sanctioned by orthodox Islamic beliefs and religious leadership, or popularly practiced. Many Muslims view the *Qur'an* as the basis for all Muslim religious decision-making and ritual actions, and as an outward expression of the sacred, Allah. The textual traditions developed by the Sunni and Shi'a provide core concepts, like *tawhid* (the oneness of God) and *shirk* ("associating' with God" or that which goes against the oneness of God), that allow Muslims to determine what is right or wrong.¹ However, outside scholars have repeatedly observed that local variations are plentiful throughout Muslim communities, which strict textualists often view as "deviations" from standard practices — or in some extreme cases, *kufur* or apostasy.

How do we account for local variations in Islamic practice, when all Muslims define their belief through a shared common foundation in this textual tradition, as found in the *Qur'an*? When different Muslim societies' interpretation of a textual tradition differ, it is possible such differences could give rise to variations in ritual actions and in the ways in which Muslims collectively decide to deal with problems within their society. In addition, it is possible that ritual actions that vary from community to community reflect extra-textual local traditions, pre-Islamic practices and beliefs, locally determined social class structures, political environments, and their interpretation what constitutes orthodox Islam.

¹ Bearman, P.J. 1965: 484

I propose limiting my focus to spirit possession in order to investigate how Muslim societies, allegedly founded on the same textual traditions, can develop multiple, religiously inspired responses to societies' problems and give rise to a variety of ritual acts. When comparing anthropological and historical evidence stemming from studies of Islamic spirit possession, one begins to see a hidden narrative about spirit possession, its practices and transformation over time. Spirit possession represents tradition whose authority has developed in tandem with orthodox Islamic authority, or the *Ulama*. It appears that within a general Islamic worldview, spirit possession is necessarily part of the wider universe and people must deal with it in one way or another. Because of Muslim belief in the existence of *jinn*, or spirits, and the possibility of possession, spirit possession and orthodox Islamic practices coexist, for better or worse, within the same society. This has led to the development of parallel spirit possession traditions, being led by two discernibly different authorities, both of whom are trying to allow Muslim society and the possessed host to fully function within the larger Islamic worldview. Furthermore, the push-and-pull between the *Ulama* and spirit possession practitioners that led to the development of parallel traditions suggests that spirit possession traditions are not just a local societal development, but a phenomenon of Islamic worldview as a whole.

With these ideas in mind, the following study is going to explore the anthropological and historical studies of spirit possession as a way to gain insight into the reasons for the parallel spirit possession traditions and, in turn, to gain insight into the reasons why there are striking similarities between what have hitherto been considered to be unique, locally-developed spirit possession practices found within Islamic societies throughout the world. Specifically, this thesis will focus on the role spirit possession played in the development of co-existing and dueling authoritative roles and the way Muslims negotiate licit and illicit religious practices. The following study of Islamic spirit possession manifestations in Africa and the Middle East provides the opportunity to explore the individual and collective understanding of the effects of religious concepts such as *tawhid* and *shirk*, and to learn how the concept of *tawhid* is the key to understanding the Muslim society and the Muslim worldview and decision-making.

STUDIES OF ISLAMIC SPIRIT POSSESSION

There have been many studies conducted that examined spirit possession in Muslim and Muslim-dominated nations and societies, and in many cases, these studies used historical and/or anthropological approaches. These approaches are inherently similar because both seek an understanding of modern day Muslim societies found throughout the world; however, the two approaches do take different routes to draw their conclusions. Historical studies of Islam start with an examination of Islamic history and textual traditions as a way to search for an understanding of modern Islamic culture, worldview, Islamic law, philosophy, theology, etc. One such case can be seen in John L. Esposito's work titled *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, where he discusses spirit possession from a historical perspective, and Susan O'Brien's *Spirit Discipline: Gender, Islam, and Hierarchies of Treatments in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria*, where she discusses the *Ulama's* view that spirit possession is an illness that prevents a Muslim from fully worshipping Allah. Other historical works do not typically discuss spirit possession practices, but they primarily discuss the development of Islam in reference to history and the textual traditions, such as Michael Hamilton Morgan's *Lost History: The Enduring Legacy of Muslim Scientists, Thinkers, and Artists*. These historical perspectives of the study of Islam typically indicate that the textual tradition may provide explanations for nearly all forms of Muslim beliefs in the modern world.

In contrast, anthropological studies of Islam focus on the examination of various Islamic societies' ritual actions and practices as a way to search for an understanding of modern Islamic culture in all of its diversity. Such studies using this approach include I.M. Lewis' *Ecstatic Religion*, where he discusses Islamic spirit possession and its potential threat to authority, and Clifford Geertz's *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, where he discusses the idea that many Islamic ritual actions develop and are specific to local communities. Furthermore, the majority of these anthropological perspectives on the study of Islam indicate that understanding a specific society's worldview through their practices can lead us to a more holistic explanation of Muslim beliefs in the

modern world.² In anthropological approaches, textual interpretations are given a lesser analytical priority, and are often viewed merely as sources of justification for everyday practices.

These parallel approaches are now starting to intersect. More recently published books and articles are beginning to present a more multidisciplinary approach to the study of Islam, even when the author does not expressly state that he/she is using a historical or anthropological approach within his/her study.³ It is hard to identify the starting point of this movement toward conducting a multidisciplinary approach, which essentially mixes anthropological and historical approaches, but it is slowly making headway within both disciplines. Part of the reason for such slow headway is that this mixture of history and cultural identity makes it difficult methodologically to study Islam -- a well-rounded scholar must be familiar with both the textual traditions and the practices of a specific Muslim community, of which knowledge is only acquired through intensive, long-term fieldwork. Nevertheless, it is possible that a multidisciplinary approach can give insight into the Islamic worldview and beliefs associated with spirit possession to a degree not possible through simply focusing on one approach.

While looking at Islam and its many forms of practices, researchers always come across practices that have both a historical and cultural basis. Muslims living and working in diverse regions and social environments share a belief that the *Qur'an* is at the core of Islamic worldview, and represents the foundation of their traditions and practices. In addition, the *hadiths*, the *Sunna of the Prophet* and *books of the Imams*, thought by many Muslims to be outgrowths of the words of the *Qur'an*, are also central to the construction of their worldview. Many Muslims have affirmed this through their statements that “the Qur'an is prime source of every Muslim's faith and practice,” and “both the Quran [*sic*] and the Hadiths made it absolutely clear the Quran [*sic*] was the supreme and ultimate authority and a guide for all Muslims in all matters.”⁴

The Islamic textual tradition, which has both an historical and cultural facet, seems to lend itself to research that is conducted using a multidisciplinary approach, considering the fact that studying only

² University of Toronto, Study of Religion: accessed July 15 2011; Universiteit Leiden, Islamic Studies, Introduction: accessed on July 15 2011

³ Wedeen, L. Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria

⁴ Understanding Islam and Muslims: accessed on May 2011; Ali Syed, M. 2004: 5

one facet could be detrimental to a true understanding of the Islamic culture, worldview, Islamic law, philosophy, theology, etc. The importance of using a multidisciplinary approach in the study of Islam can be seen in Akbar Ahmed's book titled *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*, where the author, a Muslim himself, tries to explain the role the *Qur'an* plays within Islamic society and why they choose to act the way they do. Through founded in the unified set of principles of *tawhid* and *shirk*, the variety of ways in which the *Ulama* can use and interpret the textual traditions makes the study of Islam even more complicated. In spite of this, it is promising that a multidisciplinary approach can present new insights into the development of local variations within Islamic practices, Islamic spirit possession practices, religious concepts of *tawhid* and *shirk*, and the Muslim worldview.

THE ISLAMIC TEXTUAL TRADITIONS & THE BELIEF IN SPIRIT POSSESSION

In order to lay a common foundation for our exploration into the development of parallel traditions within Islamic spirit possession, it is important to introduce some of the historical and anthropological sources. The first section will discuss the Islamic textual tradition, not only defining the term but also providing a brief explanation of the texts and discussing their significance. Muslims view the Islamic textual tradition as sacred, and this tradition includes the *Qur'an*, which is the primary source used by Islamic sects, the *sunnah*, the *hadiths*, and *books of Imams*. The second section will discuss the concept of *tawhid* and *shirk*, and how these concepts affect Islam. The third section will introduce the Islamic beliefs in spirit possession, and where and under what conditions a Muslim may become possessed. These discussions will provide valuable insight into the development of the variety of practices found within Islamic communities founded in the same textual tradition.

The Textual Traditions

Muslims consider the *Qur'an* to be among the most sacred of texts, which they believe is the final revelation of Allah. The *Qur'an* has 114 *surahs*, designed to help guide a Muslim through life. The *Qur'an* gives Muslims laws to live by and ways of dispensing justice. Furthermore, the *Qur'an* contains the rules that govern the Muslim world, that form the basis for relations between men and God, between individuals (whether Muslim or non-Muslim) and between men and all things that are part of creation.

Although Muslims consider the *Qur'an* to be the primary immutable word of Allah, revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in the seventh century, it is not the only literary tradition that affects the Muslim societies throughout the world. One can find a second important literary tradition in the *Sunnah of the Prophet*. The *sunnah* represents practices the Prophet Muhammad taught to Muslims that devout Muslims should use to guide their own lives. The *sunnah* also serves as a common template for all Muslims groups and individuals, permitting them to represent a connection to the beginnings of Islam and acting as a common reference in religious discourse of community formation and identity.⁵ Since the pre-Islamic period, the *sunnah* “has signified established custom precedent, the conduct of life, and cumulative tradition,” and “such tradition encompasses knowledge and practices believed to have been passed down from previous generations and representing an authoritative, valued, and continuing corpus of belief and customs.”⁶ However, the word *sunnah* has taken on a more specific meaning over time; “that actions and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad complemented the divinely revealed message of the *Qur'an* and embodied a paradigm and a model, constituting a source for establishing norms for Muslim conduct.”⁷ Since the *Qur'an*'s establishment, it has signified established custom, precedent, the conduct of life and cumulative tradition.⁸ What makes the *Qur'an* different from the *sunnah* is primarily its form. Unlike the *sunnah*, the *Qur'an* is quite literally the Word of Allah, whereas Allah inspired the *sunnah*, but the wording and actions belong to the Prophet. The *Qur'an* has not been composed using any human's words. Its wording is, letter for letter fixed by no one but Allah. However, many Muslims believe the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* together “are indispensable; one cannot practice Islam without consulting both of them.” Both represent the main sources for Islamic jurisprudence.⁹

The *hadiths* contain the third important literary tradition. Within the Sunni tradition, the *hadiths* are collections of narratives about the Prophet Muhammad's life, deeds, and things he approved of.¹⁰

⁵ Nanji, A. A. 1995. 137

⁶ Nanji, A. A. 1995: 136

⁷ Nanji, A. A. 1995: 136

⁸ Nanji, A. A. 1995: 136

⁹ Nanji, A. A. 1995: 136-137; Quran Explore, Sunnah and Hadith – The Sunnah of the Prophet (saw): Accessed on 17 Aug 2011; Glasse, C. 2003: 441.

¹⁰ Nanji, A. A. 1995. 137; Esposito, J. Modern Islamic World, Vol 2, 2004: 84 & 85

Muslims began to collect the many *hadiths* in beginning of the 7th and 8th centuries, out of the necessity to preserve the information about the events and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad. During this time, they collected over 600,000 *hadiths* from the Prophet Muhammad's companions, his successor and their successors, and other witnesses. With the large number of *hadiths* collected, the Muslims needed to authenticate them, leading to the development of the science of the *Hadith* Criticism.¹¹ This process of *hadith* criticism is conducted through four parts; (1) the verifying the chain of authorities (*isnad*), (2) going as far as possible back to the Prophet himself, ensuring an uninterrupted chain of a number of transmitters (*rawi*), (3) validating the nature of the *hadith* text (*matn*), and (4) ensuring the *hadith* is not a fabrication, and the parts of the text that refer to the Prophet's deeds, statements, and/or characteristics are free from alteration (*wad'*). This has led to the authentication of 4,000 *hadiths*; however, the Sunni primarily based their legal traditions on four accepted *hadith* collections from four to six important collectors. The Shi'a typically do not follow or reject the Sunni *hadith* collections because they feel they do not truly reflect the Prophet Muhammad and his actions. In turn, the Shi'a have their own accepted *hadith* collections. Either way, the Sunni and Shi'a *hadiths* help Muslims to understand what is right or wrong, and the world around them.

In addition, the *Books of the Imams* also contain the fourth important literary tradition, and are only used by the Shi'a. Within the Shi'a tradition, the *Books of the Imams* represent their understanding of the Prophet Muhammad's life, deeds, and actions, and they contain Shi'a foundation for their jurisprudence. Since Sunni *hadiths* did not come directly from Muhammad's descendants, Shi'a Muslims do not consider the Sunni *hadiths* to be an authentic transmission of Islamic traditions and the Prophet. With this in mind, the Shi'a *hadiths* and *Books of the Imams* came from Muhammad's direct descendants and as well as those who were "divinely inspired and selected representatives of God." These direct descendants or rightly guided due to their understanding of Prophet's actions, Imams, are "literally perceived to be representatives of God's justice on Earth."¹² Over time, these books led to the development of two major Shi'a schools of law, *Ja'fari* jurisprudence and *Ismaili Fatimid* jurisprudence. In either case

¹¹ Esposito, J. Modern Islamic World, Vol 2, 2004: 84

¹² Weiss, M. 2003: 93

of the Sunni or Shi'a interpretation of law or practices, these texts have become important to their understanding of the world. Sufi orders refer to themselves specifically as Sunni or Shi'a Sufis, and many orders can be further sorted into ecstatic, or emotionally driven forms, and very sober, logical and scholarly driven Sufi schools of thought. Even though scholars consider Sufis to be a mystical dimension of Islam, most Sufis also acknowledge the supremacy of the textual tradition, and utilize various *hadiths* or *Books of the Imams* within their practices.

These texts listed above are the sources that religious leaders and many Muslims use to seek answers to their questions about life, the universe, and themselves. Such questions could involve personal problems, worldly events or the supernatural, even cases of spirit possession. Depending on the question and severity of the situation, these religious leaders might be able to answer in a matter of minutes based on their memory of *Qur'an's* passages and past religious rulings. Other questions may require the religious leaders to search the *Qur'an*, *sunnah*, and many *hadiths*, in the Sunni tradition, or the *Qur'an*, *sunnah*, *hadiths* and the *Books of the Imams*, in the Shi'a tradition, before responding. This textual tradition holds the sacred precedents Islamic societies use as the basis and foundation for their worldview. These texts are also the basis for Islamic law and define a Muslim's actions, religious consciousness, and direct piety. No less important, these texts may allow historians and anthropologists to begin exploring how Muslims make decisions about their beliefs – in spite of the diversity of practices, it becomes possible to trace them back to a literary tradition.

Tawhid and Shirk

Before examination of spirit possession can begin, it is necessary to discuss the concepts of *tawhid* and *shirk* and their effects on Islamic authorities in order to gain an understanding of Muslims' interpretation of the textual tradition in relation to spirit possession. The concept of *tawhid* is a man-made doctrine that defines Islam with its origin in the basis of the *Qur'an*. It is the core of all Islamic religious knowledge, as well as its history, metaphysics, esthetics, ethics, social order, economic order and indeed the entire Islamic world order.¹³ The concept of *tawhid* can be found throughout Islam, and is shared by

¹³ Pinault, D. 1992: 14

the many Islamic sects, even though the word *tawhid* is not written down anywhere in any of the sacred texts. Throughout the *Qur'an*, it asserts Allah is a single, absolute transcending truth found throughout the whole universe. One common statement is from the *Al-Fatiha* (the opening *surah* of the *Qur'an*) and is *Bismillāhi r-rahmāni r-raḥīm* (In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful).¹⁴ Muslims throughout the world consider this statement the most sacred verse recited, and it embodies the concept of *tawhid*. Within Islam, Allah instructs a Muslim through the *Qur'an* to live a life for the sake of the greatness and goodness of Allah. In David Pinault's book titled, *The Shiites: Ritual and Popular Piety in a Muslim Community*, he explains,

The message of *tawhid* enunciated by the Prophet can best be appreciated by glancing at the audience to whom it was first directed, the Arab tribes living in and around Mecca. The religion of the Arab Jahiliyah ("the period of ignorance," as Muslim historians term the pre-Islamic era) can be characterized as animist: spirits (jinn or "genies") were believed to reside in and around rock formations, trees, and ruins in the desert wastes. Reverence was paid as well to numerous astral deities, including a creator-God, Allah and "the daughters of Allah," a triad of goddesses associated with the planet Venus, with cave-sanctuaries and with sacred stones, who held power over fertility and the agricultural cycle, illness and healing, and personal destiny.¹⁵

In the period of *Jahiliyah*, Allah was the supreme authority over many other authorities, such as his daughters, as seen in the quote above. These authorities play an important role within Bedouin Tribal beliefs; however, Allah becomes the only authority, as seen in the Muslim belief in *tawhid*. This belief in the oneness of Allah starts to emerge in this pre-Islamic period through the Bedouin Tribes' dualist beliefs. When the Prophet Muhammad destroys the statues of Allah's daughters, he is trying to show society that Allah is the only religious authority, which in turn strengthens the concept of *tawhid*.

In addition to the concept of *tawhid*, the concept of *shirk* plays an important role in Muslim society and in the choices members make. *Shirk* can be any action that a Muslim performs that goes against the oneness of Allah. This is a grave sin for a Muslim, so he/she must continually live a life for Allah with his/her interpretations, actions, and beliefs by keeping in mind the oneness of Allah. Those accused of committing *shirk* include Muslims who are sloppy with performing their appropriate practices, do not pray all the time, or miss a prayer-- but the Islamic community, *Ummah*, does not excommunicate

¹⁴ Qur'an: 1:1

¹⁵ Pinault, D. 1992:11-12

these Muslims from society. However, there are many Muslims who choose to perform actions that many of *Ulama* feel are *shirk*, but this does not mean that the practitioner or the Muslims themselves feel their actions are not rightly guided by Allah's will.

One can see this difference in practice in what is considered the “mainstream” or orthodox Islamic practices. The Islamic religion is considerably complex: one can see this throughout the different ideals and practices in the Middle East. The Sufi, like the whirling dervishes, both Sunni, and Shi'a, found throughout the world are just some of the many different groups who have different ideas on what it means to be a proper Muslim. For example, the Sunni and Shi'a feel the Sufis are not true Muslims, because the Sunni and Shi'a consider some of the Sufi practices, such as chanting the 99 names of Allah while spinning in order to get closer to Allah and his will for man, to be non-Islamic, or *shirk*. In addition, the Sunnis and Shi'a have disagreed with one another to such a point that the Shi'a feel they need to practice *Taqiyah*, the practice of precautionary denial of religious belief in the face of potential persecution, because the Sunni majority throughout history has periodically persecuted them.

Each one of these groups and even Muslims within these groups have different ideas on what is considered to be proper practices, because all of their worldviews have been affected by different environments, histories, social structures, and political structures. Even though *tawhid* is the major unifying component within the religion of Islam, the perceptions and interpretations of Muslim thinkers, theologians, authorities and societies has led to a variety of outward religious expressions and divinations. Muslims' different perspectives and interpretations of how *tawhid* affects society come from differences in Muslims' understanding of their world and environment, and this in turn has affected the development of modern-day spirit possession practices.

The Islamic Belief in Spirit Possession: In General

Anthropological studies define a possessed person the same way I.M. Lewis did in his book *Ecstatic Religion*. His definition of a possessed person is someone whose culture deems him or her to be

possessed.¹⁶ He states there is another theory anthropologists use to define spirit possession, namely the “temporary absence of the victim’s soul,” also referred to as “soul-loss.”¹⁷ He continues to state “full possession itself is widely perceived as a form of temporary death, sometimes called ‘half-death’, or ‘little death.’”¹⁸ Furthermore, this idea that spirit possession causes a ‘little death’ which prevents Muslims from fully participating in important ritual actions that define what it means to be a Muslim is shared among many non-Muslim and Muslim communities. This shared belief suggests that Muslim beliefs about spirit possession could have been borrowed either from neighboring non-Muslims, or represents a ‘leftover’ from pre-Islamic local practices. Even though I. M. Lewis’ ideas on spirit possession were written in 1971, they are important to this study of Islamic spirit possession, since Muslims all over the world believe in spirit possession and the fact that it can occur to anyone who does not take steps to prevent it. With this in consideration, what are the general Islamic spirit possession beliefs?

Muslims believe Allah created *jinn*, or in singular form, the *jinni*, along with mankind and angels, since “Allah is the creator of all things.”¹⁹ The *surah* 72, titled “The Jinn,” in the Qur’an discusses *jinn* and the dangers they pose for humankind.²⁰ The *jinn* are part of the larger Islamic world, and this in turn has led to the understanding that Muslims could become possessed. Many faiths consider spirit possession possible, and perhaps such beliefs predate Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Ancient stories told within the Islamic traditions of David playing music to soothe the evil spirit in Saul, and Solomon being the first to subjugate *jinn* to his will, are both examples of belief in spirits preceding Islam.²¹ In addition, other studies have suggested that spirit possession practices commonly occurred among the Arab Bedouin before the rise of Islam. Such stories, studies, and statements in the Islamic textual tradition about spirit possession, and many others, suggest the Islamic belief in bad/evil spirits and spirit possession already existed at the

¹⁶ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 40; I.M. Lewis is considered a major ethnographer of spirit possession, who study of shamanism and spirit possession represents one of the earliest anthropological treatises on the subject. He also studied the nomadic tribes in Somalia.

¹⁷ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 40

¹⁸ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 50 & 51

¹⁹ Qur’an: 13:16 & 39:62

²⁰ Qur’an: 72

²¹ Dols, M. W. 2004: 88

time the religion was formed in 622 A.D. The stories of David, Saul, and Solomon dealing with the *jinn* suggest the idea of a spirit possessing a human may be as old as human religious expression.

Emilie Savage-Smith in *The Formation of The Classical Islamic World: Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, states that recorded belief in *jinn* did not arise until much later in Islamic history; however, there is proof of an early belief of spirits and spirit possession before the Islamic belief in *jinn*.²² The book *Thousand and One Nights* contains one of the earliest stories of Islamic belief in *jinn*.²³ Other useful information about the pre-Islamic/early Islamic belief in *jinn* and spirit possession “can be found in the pre-Islamic poets, also in the *Qur’an*, Muhammad’s biography and the other older Islamic literature, and still further in later Islamic literature.”²⁴ This Islamic literature includes the traditions of *hadith* and Islamic concepts.

One of the best examples comes from the *Qur’an* where it has statements about avoiding people who practice the mystical arts that might cause one to be possessed, as seen stated in *surah* 113. “Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the Dawn, From the mischief of created things; From the mischief of Darkness as it overspreads; From the mischief of those who practices secret arts; And from the mischief of the envious one as he practices envy.”²⁵ This statement references the fact that Muslims need to avoid the pre-Islamic practice of casting spells through knots and casting the Evil Eye.²⁶ *Surah* 114 contains another example, which states,

I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind, The King (or Ruler) of Mankind,
The god (or judge) of Mankind, From the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who
withdraws (after his whisper), (The same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind,
Among *jinn*s and among men.²⁷

These statements explain how a Muslim should seek and follow the will of Allah, since any other spirit or essence whispering to mankind is whispering the will of Satan (*Iblis*) and is taking mankind away from their “true” faith.

²² Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 26; Dols, M. W. 2004: 92; Dr. Savage-Smith is a professor of the History of Islamic Science at the University of Oxford.

²³ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 26

²⁴ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 26

²⁵ *Qur’an*: 113:1-5

²⁶ Golden, D. H. 1929: 569

²⁷ *Qur’an*: 114:1-5

Muslims believe the *jinn* can exist in places with connections to the underworld, such as springs, wells, cisterns, and all places linked to underground water. *Jinn* might also dwell in caves, rock chasms, dark valleys, gorges, graves, etc., because of their connection to the underworld. Even cracks in the ground caused by great heat, a scratch in the ground made with a plow, or a space dug for a house foundation can be sufficient opening to allow the *jinn* access to the surface of the earth.²⁸ Trees (and shrubs) reach into the underworld with their roots; consequently, *jinn* often inhabit them as well. Lastly, *jinn* can appear in places where someone has died or even in the desert.

In addition, Muslims believe the *jinn* can take on many forms. The *jinn* can be animals, and they are typically camels, donkeys, goats, monkeys, dogs, cats, hedgehogs, hyenas, ravens, owls, cockerels, hens with their chicks, scorpions and especially snakes. *Jinn* can also appear as monstrous hybrid beings.²⁹ *Jinn* can be male or female spirits; however, they cannot produce offspring (among themselves or with human partners).³⁰ The *jinn* sometimes take human form. In Michael Lambek's study of spirit possession among a Muslim family titled *Spirit and Spouses: Possession as a System of Communication Among the Malagasy Speakers of Mayotte*, he states, "a sharp distinction is maintained between the identities of spirit and host. Indeed, while most (but not all) hosts in Mayotte are women, the spirits who replace them are usually (but, again, not always) male. Spirits may also be of much older or younger status than their hosts."³¹

The *jinn* often have the human desires to eat and drink, and Emilie Savage-Smith stated in *The Formation of The Classical Islamic World: Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, that Muslims believe the *jinn*'s favorite food is raw meat and their favorite drink is fresh blood.³² In Richard Natvig's record of Muslim and Christian spirit possession titled *Oromos, Slaves and the Zar Spirits: A Contribution to the History of the Zar Cult*, Natvig supports the idea that the spirits prefer meat, whether raw or not; however, the spirits do not always drink the blood of the sacrifice. In Natvig's study of Lewis Krapf and Charles

²⁸ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 12-14

²⁹ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 11

³⁰ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 10-11

³¹ Lambek, M. 1990: 319; Dr. Lambek is an anthropology professor at the University of Toronto.

³² Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 10-11

William Isenberg's missionaries accounts in South-Eastern-Africa, of a "Proto-Zar Cult" Ethiopian ceremony of 1840s, the *zar* [a name of a spirit] beliefs and their practices represent one of the earliest accounts of the *zar* cult, and this ceremony. He notes that the ceremonies that they witnessed bear "striking resemblance to [modern day] *zar* cult ritual."³³ Natvig quotes Isenberg's account as follows: "After having witnessed an extraordinary instance of Zarolatry in our own house, where we saw an otherwise intelligent and respectable woman alternately smoking and praying to the Zārs with great vehemence until she was mad, and then killing a hen, whose brain she ate and became quiet again."³⁴ Natvig also summarizes Krapf's account by stating, "the brains are reserved for the afflicted person, while the rest is eaten by 'the assistants.'"³⁵ What is not stated in Natvig's study is that the possessed woman has to "come to terms" with her spirit. The assistants—probably the *zar* cult practitioner and the woman's family—have helped the woman succumb or "come to terms" with the spirit through a trance brought on by the praying, singing, smoking, and eating brains in order to appease her spirit.³⁶ However, in the modern *zar* cult, the practice of drinking blood is not a common practice anymore, and Natvig explains this by stating,

The Egyptian *zar* cult ... [sacrifices animals] while the spirits are ritually possessing the person, in order that they may partake directly of the sacrifice, when the blood is poured over the possessed person, who lets the blood soak into the clothes, rubs it into the sink, and rarely today than formerly, drinks some of the blood. Certain parts of the sacrificial animal are also set aside for the possessed person – i.e. the spirit – while the rest is shared between the *zar* leader, his or her assistants, cult members, and other guest at the ceremony. The parts reserved for the possessed person may be the brain, the eyes, tongue, or stomach, according to the demands of the possessing spirit.³⁷

Natvig also gives another example of both Lewis Krapf and Charles William Isenbreg's accounts of the "Proto-Zar Cult" Ethiopian ceremony lending credence to the idea spirits like to eat meat and sometimes drink blood.

However, blood is not the only thing a spirit might drink. According to Michael Lambek's study of spirit possession titled *Spirit and Spouses: Possession as a System of Communication Among the Malagasy Speakers of Mayotte*, a spirit might drink cologne:

³³ Natvig, R. 1988: 681; Dr. Natvig is an associate professor in the Department of Archeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion at the University of Bergen.

³⁴ Natvig, R. 1988: 681

³⁵ Natvig, R. 1988: 682-683

³⁶ Messing, S. 2009: 1120

³⁷ Natvig, R. 1988: 682-683

Mze Bunu [the spirit] then rose and went to fetch a bottle of cologne from which he began to take swigs. He tried to tempt a couple of Mohedja's [the spirit's host] small grandchildren (who were playing in a corner of the room) to try some, but they refused. One little girl had cut her finger while peeling sugar cane, and Mze Bunu remarked that the blood would also taste good... After some idle talk, during which I pondered the story, Mze Bunu finally left, saying that he was afraid if he stayed he would finish the entire bottle of cologne. But, the spirit suggested in parting, perhaps I would soon give him a gift of another bottle.³⁸

Natvig, Lambek and Savage-Smith's studies all support the belief that the spirits like to eat and drink extraordinary things that the human host, a devout Muslim, would never consider edible in ordinary life.

In addition to the *jinn* taking on many forms and having human-like desires to eat and drink, Muslims believe these *jinn* can communicate with humans. Lambek states that the spirit can talk to the host through two different means: the host's dreams or through an intermediary. Lambek said that,

Mohedja [the host] often does not listen to the advice he [spirit] tries to give her directly (i.e., through her dreams). Therefore, the spirit frequently chooses to communicate with her through third parties... Then, turning his attention back to me, the spirit asked if I would pass on a message to Mohedja. He said that Mohedja wouldn't listen if he told her directly, and he didn't want to communicate through the usual channel—namely, Tumbu [the host's husband]—because what he had to say would undoubtedly make Tumbu angry, and would lead to fighting... A few moments later, Mohedja regained consciousness and I passed on Mze Bunu's message. Mohedja appeared surprised, but listened with grave interest. When I finished, she recounted the original incident in the fields in great detail, telling me how bluntly she had refused the man, how insistent he had been (although he did back off in the end), and how frightened she had been. She then went on to tell me about a few other times in her life when she had been in similar situations. Altogether, she talked for well over an hour. Mohedja is usually quite laconic, and must have been feeling a strong urge to discuss the matter with someone. While she did not say, outright, that Mze Bunu's advice was correct, she did concede that she might not be as physically capable of defending herself as she once had been. She seemed, as in deed the message from her spirit would imply, to be somewhat uncertain as to how to handle such unpleasant situations.³⁹

As seen in Michael Lambek's study above, the spirit tries to enter into a conversation with the host. Allan Young further supports this in his study titled "Why Amhara Get 'kureynya': Sickness and Possession in an Ethiopian 'zar' Cult." He states, "the spirits also visit her in dreams and during sickness episodes."⁴⁰

What makes the idea that the spirit tries to communicate with the host more interesting is the fact that spirit and host are essentially the same person. With the inherent nature of spirit possession, the only way the spirit can transmit its wishes to the host is through the host's mind, using dreams, or acting through an

³⁸ Lambek, M. 1990: 320-321

³⁹ Lambek, M. 1990: 320-321

⁴⁰ Young, A. 1975: 568

intermediary. This idea of trying to talk to oneself through other people and hearing voices might be a reason why others consider a possessed Muslim to be a lunatic, and call him or her *majnun* (possessed by a *jinni*).⁴¹

Lastly, Muslims believe their actions can provoke a spirit possession and that there are many ways a Muslim could provoke a spirit to possess them. Ibn-al Qayyim, who was a Sunni Islamic jurist, states,

Evil spirit mostly gains control of those having little religious inclination and those whose heart and tongues faith has deserted; those souls are desolate of the remembrance of Allah and of the formulas for strengthening faith. When evil spirits meet a man who is isolated, weaponless and naked, they are easily able to attack him and overcome.⁴²

Muslims believe there are three different ways a human may be possessed by a *jinni*, and Ibn Taymiyyah, who was an Islamic scholar and theologian between 1263-1328 C.E., suggests the following circumstances:

The occasional possession of man by the *jinn* may be due to sensual desires on the part of the *jinn*...or even love, as it may be among humans...

Demonic possession sometimes also occurs as a result of horseplay, jest or plain evil on the part of the *jinn*, just as evil and mischief occurs among humans for similar reasons...

Possession is most often a result of the *jinn* being angry because some wrong has been done to them. Thus, the *jinn* punish those who wronged them. For example, when the humans accidentally harm or hurt them by urinating on them, by pouring hot water on them, or by killing some of them, the *jinn* think that they have been intentionally harmed. Although humans may not realize what they have done, the *jinn* are by nature very ignorant, harsh, and volatile in their behavior, so they may vengefully punish human much more severely than they deserve.⁴³

There is also a possibility for a human to be partially possessed. A partial possession occurs when a spirit makes contact with a human through disembodied voices speaking “directly or indirectly through the medium.”⁴⁴ Ibn Taymiyyah states, “The *jinn* usually communicate by either visions or voices with those seeking information among the idol-worshippers. Christians, Jews and heretical Muslims driven astray by the devils... the devils will often respond while taking the form of the one besought, whether dead or alive.” Elsewhere he said, “... and among the [i.e., disbelievers, pagans, magicians etc.] are those who

⁴¹ Savage-Smith, E. 2004:

⁴² Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 110

⁴³ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 111

⁴⁴ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 111

believe that when someone dies he can return and communicate with them, pay their debts, retrieve their lost items, and advise them.”⁴⁵ Lastly, a spirit can possess someone who has a possessed object, since *jinn* can “penetrate and control animate and inanimate objects in order to harm humans or to mislead them.”⁴⁶

Simon Messing’s study titled *Group Therapy and Social Status in the Zar Cult of Ethiopia*, suggests that humans -- Muslim, Christians, and pagans -- are vulnerable to possession in five different ways. He states, “Humans differ considerably in degree of vulnerability, and certain situations are considered particularly inviting to the zars.”⁴⁷ The first possible way humans are vulnerable to possession is through heredity, and, in some cases, the mothers even promote their daughter to become possessed by their spirit to ensure the spirit's continued devotion. The second possible way humans are vulnerable to possession is through psychic predestination, and victims “are ‘chosen’ by the zar for their melancholy natures or weak personalities (e.g., alcoholics).”⁴⁸ The third possible way humans are vulnerable to possession is through their attractive qualities, and including “the beauty of a woman of the enchanting voice of a chorister (‘däbtära’).”⁴⁹ The fourth possible way humans are vulnerable to possession is through accidents of geographical proximity, because spirits often reside in the same areas as humans. Messing states, “Natural situations which attract a zar include geographical spots, especially the bush where the spirits have their abode.”⁵⁰ The final possible way humans are vulnerable to possession is through their choices, actions or just being human, because some spirits like to harass the victims sexually.

The aforementioned information just highlights the complexity found in Islamic spirit possession beliefs and their practices. What is not directly discussed above, but is reason for this examination into spirit possession, is the fact it becomes noticeable that spirit possession is considered by many Muslims to be an illness that sometimes cannot be avoided and causes the host to conduct acts that might be considered inappropriate. Different authorities conduct these practices, whether licit or illicit, in different

⁴⁵ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 111

⁴⁶ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 111

⁴⁷ Messing, S. 2009: 1121; Dr. Messing is a cultural anthropologist at the Southern Connecticut State University.

⁴⁸ Messing, S. 2009: 1121

⁴⁹ Messing, S. 2009: 1121

⁵⁰ Messing, S. 2009: 1122

ways as a way to soothe or to expel the wildness the spirit threatens the host and community through the spirit's infliction on the host. Some of these actions by the host and their respected authorities are to be avoided at all costs within the Islamic community, *Ummah*, since the host is not in his/her/their right mind and the actions are considered to not be their own, but the spirit's actions. The Islamic community's indirect acceptance of spirit's desire to act out and demand illicit items does not make the host not a Muslim, and demonstrates that Muslims view spirit possession to cause the host to have a "temporary absence of their soul." Hence, this examination's goal is to explain why this noticeable variety in spirit possession practices occurs throughout the larger Islamic world, when these groups are founded in the same textual tradition.

STUDY LIMITATIONS

It is important to state early on the limitations of this study, and to address the fact the study is not complete. There are three noteworthy limitations of this study: the paucity of research on Shi'a and Sufi spirit possession practices that was available, limitations in access to some historical Islamic sources due to their rarity and inaccessibility, and an imbalance created by the vast number of sources associated with the orthodox Islamic textual tradition.

Although the belief of spirit possession is in every Islamic society, this examination will primarily focus on the Sunni tradition and their beliefs in spirit possessions because it is very difficult to find sources on Shi'a and Sufi spirit possession practices. While conducting this examination, it became apparent that the majority of the sources and previous research on Islamic spirit possession practices occurred in predominantly Sunni areas of the world. In addition, it was noticeable, especially after conducting a great deal of research on Islamic spirit possession, that many of the studies stating there was a belief in spirit possession in Shi'a and Sufism have limited citations. Therefore, this inadequate documentation of source material makes it difficult to explore Shi'a and Sufi beliefs in spirit possession thoroughly. However, wherever possible, the limited information on their practices will be included.

Before undertaking such an examination, we must discuss two problems associated with the research. First, these pre-Islamic influences are sometimes hard to uncover due to issues with historical

sources and the variety of religious interpretations. Historical sources from the early formation of Islam are rare, and the traditional narrative about the formation of Islam dates from 150-200 years later, during the reign of the third caliph, 'Uthman (r. 644-656).⁵¹ These historical accounts originate from an oral tradition, and therefore these sources are not firsthand written accounts describing early events. Additionally, this formalization of the textual tradition does not mean that the changing environments did not affect Islamic practices and rituals, changing political and religious authorities, and/or developing religious insight over the last 1,355 years, since the reign of 'Uthman.

Furthermore, these early sources occurred during a time where there was a vigorous debate on what it meant to be a Muslim and what form the Muslim community should eventually take. After the formation of the textual traditional narrative, Islam had split into the two major denominations, Sunni and Shi'a, due to a conflict over political and religious authorities. This split occurred very early within Islam's development as a religion and political institution, which led to the development of at least two simultaneous bodies of religious tradition and practice.

Another limitation to this study is the large quantity of available Islamic texts and information. Estimates state there are 600,000 *hadiths*, 2,712 authenticated *hadiths* not repeated out of Bukhari *Sahih*'s 7,275, and 4,000 authenticated *hadiths* not repeated out of Muslim *Sahih*'s 9,200⁵² This overabundance in *hadiths* poses a difficult task for this project, although the creation of online, academically based, databases have given researchers better access to *hadith* collections. These sites also have made it easier to comb through this data, in spite of the fact that not all *hadiths* are available online.

Nevertheless, these limitations are just gaps in the research, and the missing information has not presented itself as critically necessary in order to complete a general understanding of Islamic spirit possession. The available information has lent itself to a foundational study that paves the way for further examination of Islamic spirit possession practices, perhaps after additional field research into both Shi'a and Sufi practices. The few articles available on Shi'a and Sufi spirit possession practices nevertheless

⁵¹ Esposito, J. Vol 4 2004:

⁵² Hadith and the Prophet Muhammad. Accessed on 18 Aug 2011.

allow the reader to gain a general understanding of their practice and rituals, and it allows us to conduct this study.

CONTINUED EXPLORATION THROUGH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

How do we then account for local variation within Islamic practices regarding spirit possession, when all Muslims define their belief through a shared common foundation in this textual tradition, as found in the *Qur'an*? We can approach this question through a multidisciplinary examination of the simultaneous competing authoritative gender-oriented roles within spirit possession practices and illicit religious practices. With this in mind, the following Chapters of the thesis will start with explorations into the complex forms of authorities and ritual practices that are found within Islam. Historical sources, including the *Qur'an*, *Hadiths*, the *Books of Imams*, and the many historical anthropological studies will be critical in the search for a foundation and understanding of the multiple influences. There are many political influences found throughout history that have affected the development of the Islamic worldview, which in turn have affected Muslims' views on spirit possession and its practices. Such influences include pre-Islamic practices and beliefs incorporated into Islam at the time of its founding, the diverse views that have contributed to Muslims' understanding of the textual tradition at the time of its formation, and extra-textual local traditions that Muslims adopted as Islam expanded beyond the Arabian Peninsula. These influences have shaped and created a variety of opposing authoritative roles with Muslim spirit possession practices. Although many of these political influences may have been indirect, they still have affected the role of Muslim men and women within the many known religious practices. However, as will be seen in the next two chapters, the simple answer really does not give justice to the effects that these influences have had on the development of simultaneous competing authoritative gender oriented roles within spirit possession practices.

With this in mind, this thesis intends to explore the tandem development of parallel traditions through extensive review, examination, and comparison of historical and anthropological sources and research that is associated with spirit possession and Islam. These studies include information from primary, secondary and some unconventional sources about historical development and influences on

Islam and spirit possession, details about spirit possession practices, and the associated historical/textual and anthropological views. Additionally, as the thesis explores and reviews these sources, one begins to see similarities and commonalities between the material, even when historical and anthropological approaches and ideas about spirit possession, its effects on society, and the way society decides to deal with spirit possession all seem to reflect some major differences. However, as we conduct a closer examination of material, especially when we compare in detail the historical and anthropological studies from the same period, the similarities and ties between the materials begin to appear from the hidden depths. The comparison of these sources is the key to this thesis' exploration into the development of spirit possession and Islam authorities and their spirit possession practices are in tandem with one another.

II. NEGOTIATING THE LICIT & ILLICIT ACTIONS WITHIN SPIRIT POSSESSION

It is evident that there are many ways to deal with spirit possession, and these practices correlate with their respected authorities: either the orthodox Islamic authorities (*Ulama*), or spirit possession practitioners. However, there are members of the *Ulama* who believe that the spirit possession practitioners and their practices are *shirk*. Susan O'Brien in her article titled "Spirit Discipline: Gender, Islam, and Hierarchies of Treatments in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria," she quotes a *rukiyya* (Islamic exorcist), who states:

There is a cure for every illness in the Holy Qur'an. What cannot be cured by the Qur'an cannot be cured...Most of the illnesses of the human body, up to ninety-percent are caused by the spirits, and are meant to prevent you from worshipping God fully⁵³

Muslims believe spirit possession is necessarily an unavoidable part of their existence, which has led to the development of multiple forms of ritual actions and practices as a way to deal with spirit possession. They must deal with this necessary evil, as mentioned above, whether spirit possession is curable/controllable or is an incurable/uncontrollable/chronic disease. Furthermore, spirit possession itself is considered to be an illness within many Muslim societies across the world; in many cases, the possessed host's actions are not considered to be of their own doing, even though many of their actions would typically be considered to be *shirk* by the *Ulama*. This dynamic of negotiating the licit and illicit plays an important role in the treatment of spirit possession, because the spirit's wildness, whether demanding illicit items or threatening their society's ability to worship Allah, has to be controlled. This shared goal between these two major spirit possession authorities, the *Ulama* and the spirit possession practitioners, has led to development of a variety of spirit possession practices, where Muslims have given in to their spirit's illicit demands, or sought treatment from a possessed practitioner who is not in his/her right frame of mind to be considered rightly guided.

⁵³ O'Brien, S. 2001: 229

With this in mind, it seems that the aspects of worldview associated with spirit possession and parallel authorities do not seem to be something outside of or alien to the greater Islamic worldview. Although *Ulama* want nothing to do with these spirits, they nonetheless have to acknowledge that spirits are part of their existence, and they must deal with them in one way or another. Hence, the realm of spirit possession and the inseparability and negotiation of licit and illicit actions represent the many complexities found in Islam. The continued exploration into reasons why the spirit possession practitioners and the *Ulama* deal with that which lies beyond the pale will give further insight into the rise of multiple, religiously-inspired responses to societies' problems and a variety of ritual acts.

SPIRIT POSSESSION RITUAL ACTIONS/PRACTICES

Spirit possession and the illness it causes to a Muslim is a serious concern to the Muslim society. The Islamic textual tradition clearly states that spirit possession can occur, and it affects a Muslim's ability to worship Allah. Considering this, the *Ummah* has created a variety of ways to deal with spirit possession and with taming the spirit's wildness. This fear of the *jinn* and its wildness has led many Muslims to take drastic measures to prevent themselves from being possessed or to deal with possession after the fact. Some of these measures include avoiding whistling, since whistling might summon serpents, scorpions, and of course, the devil.⁵⁴ In addition, many Muslims believe offering various kinds of prayers or praying to a Muslim saint, or speaking the 99 names of Allah provides further protection. Lastly, a Muslim can carry an amulet with the verses of the *Qur'an* and other Islamic elements to provide protection.

However, prevention does not always work, so Muslims, through the approved orthodox practices recommended by the *Ulama* or through the illicit practices of the spirit possession cult, have developed a variety of alternatives to deal with spirit possession. These practices include the fact that a Muslims can "address the spirits directly and seek to placate them," "rather than appealing to God or another exalted power," and sacrifices.⁵⁵ These actions do not always stop a spirit from possessing a human; they might only weaken the possession. This threat and varying dynamics within Islamic spirit possession has, over time, led to the development of five major ways to deal with spirit possession: soothing the spirit,

⁵⁴ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 19-20

⁵⁵ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 21

converting the spirit, performing a magical healing, exorcising the spirit, or isolating the spirit and leaving it alone to die.

Soothing the Spirit

Soothing is one of the most common practices that Muslims engage in to deal with Islamic spirit possession, and it is possibly one of the oldest associated practices to get the spirit to behave within society's determined norms. We saw this earlier in the stories about David and Solomon, where Islam recognizes that David soothed the evil spirit in Saul, and Solomon subjugated the *jinn* to his will. Arab Bedouin tribes practiced soothing a spirit and soothsaying through the *kahin*; however, the *kahin*'s soothsaying practices probably became unnecessary and became shunned with the development and spread of Islam throughout the Arab Bedouin tribes. Since the *Qur'an* suggests that Islamic practices incorporated many the practices and traditions associated with the Bedouin tribes, it is possible that, on some level, spirit possession practices integrated the *kahins* or their practices into spirit possession practices, and possibly, they had an effect on modern day Islamic practices (see Chapter 3). History and anthropology have also presented evidence for the continued practice of soothing within Islamic spirit possession cults and communities.

The practice of soothing is accomplished through negotiation and placation, and many of the Islamic societies associated with spirit possession have processes to get the spirit to identify itself before the negotiation and placation can begin. Many of these spirit possession cults begin the process by determining whether the host is truly possessed. Being a member of the cult means a spirit possesses you and "a person joins the zar cult because she (or he) has been chosen by a zar."⁵⁶ Once the host, or as Safa calls the possessed host, "horse," has been chosen by the spirit, society has to recognize that the host has been possessed. This identification process can have many steps and can occur over multiple days; however, in every documented case of Islamic spirit possession it is necessary that the possessed person's society deem the individual possessed.

⁵⁶ Natvig, R. 1987: 682

We can see one example of this process in Messing's 1958 study of the *zar* cult in the Northern Ethiopian city of Gondar. Messing states the first step for the possessed person is to demonstrate their spirit possession to gain society's acceptance. By demonstrating their possession, they can then begin the process of becoming a member of the *zar* cult. First, the *zar* cult practitioner will question the possessed victim, and while he/she is in a possessed trance, the practitioner will "try to lure the unknown *zar* of the patient ('his horse') into public possession."⁵⁷ If the possession occurs in the morning, the family waits until nightfall to take the possessed victim to the practitioner's house. Until then, the victim is never left alone, and Messing states;

The patient is therefore surrounded by sympathetic kinfolk, entertained with song and dance, and promises are made to fulfill any desires. In cases of hysterical possession, which typically takes the form of wanting to run into the bush at night and mingle with the hyenas, relatives may restrain the patient with ropes.⁵⁸

Then in the evening, the family takes the victim to the practitioner's house, and a family member gives the practitioner "an entry gift, called 'incense money.'"⁵⁹

The practitioner seemingly ignores the possessed victim, until the practitioner becomes fully possessed himself. In addition, a male, in this case, leads the cult in rhythmic clapping and singing new and old hymns of praise. Messing suggests, "This ritual recharges the interrogation whenever it becomes difficult."⁶⁰ The practitioner will coax the spirit into the open through promises and threats, so the spirit cannot rest, and the practitioner pretends that he knows who the spirit is. The victim only answers the practitioner after considerable resistance, but this spirit confesses who it is publicly before the negotiations can begin. The *zar* will demand things, and the practitioner will negotiate "through a lengthy process of financial dickering."⁶¹

The *zar* identity is revealed by the patient's 'individual' *zar* dance (*gurri*), in which the spirit obliges his human 'horse' to perform publicly while the doctor [practitioner] watches and directs. Then, the cult enrolls the possessed victim into the cult for the rest of his/her life, since the spirit will afflict

⁵⁷ Messing, S. 1958: 1120

⁵⁸ Messing, S. 1958: 1123

⁵⁹ Messing, S. 1958: 1123

⁶⁰ Messing, S. 1958: 1123

⁶¹ Messing, S. 1958: 1120

him/her for the rest of his/her life.⁶² Finally, the possessed victim “learns to intone the proper war-chant (*fukkara*)” for their spirit; however, it could take “several nights to achieve this final expression.”⁶³ This process of spirit identification is very important to the *zar* cult in Gondar because it allows society to deem the host to be possessed, and to start the soothing practices. Through the teaching of the war-chant to the victim, society has begun the process of soothing the spirit.

Another way society identifies that a host may be possessed occurs when an individual contracts a serious illness that doctors cannot cure. We can see this in Veit Erlmann’s 1982 study of the Hausa *bòorii* spirit possession cult where the person must experience a serious illness, “such as paralysis or sterility,” and not be successfully treated by a *Qur’anic* scholar (*maalaimii*) or by a local practitioner (*bookaa*) in order to become a cult member.⁶⁴ This failure to cure the person suggests that one of the four hundred kinds of spirits could possess the person. The initiation ceremony (*girkaa*) can last seven days, and “ultimately leads to an agreement with the offended spirit.”⁶⁵ Erlmann continues by stating,

The new adept (*yar boorii*) is then considered to be the spirit's "mare" (*goo'diiyaa*), whom the spirit may "ride" (*hawaa*) during particular rites. These rites are celebrated during important events that concern the community of *boorii* adepts or other individuals who wish to establish ritual contact with the spirits for their own specific needs. In the latter case, payment of the *boorii* adepts and musicians becomes a primary feature of the cult.⁶⁶

These ceremonies include music, provided by specialized musicians, and Erlmann states there is music before and after the ceremony to entertain members songs of praise for important cult members and “all individual tunes (*taakee*) for each of the more than four hundred spirits.”⁶⁷ These musicians lead a variety of sung or played songs using a variety of musical instruments, which includes gourd-rattles (*cakii*), calabashes (*k’waryaa*), one-stringed bowed lute (*googee*), and/or calabash-bodied drums (*dumaa*). Being a member of Hausa *bòorii* spirit possession cult can become a full-time job for cult devotees who live in urban centers, because their “ceremonies are often organized as purely secular shows (*waiasaa*) which do

⁶² Messing, S. 1958: 1124

⁶³ Messing, S. 1958: 1124

⁶⁴ Erlmann, V. 1982: 49

⁶⁵ Erlmann, V. 1982: 49

⁶⁶ Erlmann, V. 1982: 49

⁶⁷ Erlmann, V. 1982: 50

not involve trance.”⁶⁸ Erlmann finished his study by elaborating on the importance the music plays in the cult's rituals.

Both Erlmann's and Messing's studies are great examples of the significance of the identification process of the spirit, since its formal identification allows the cults to use certain music and chants to soothe the host's possession. This in turn prevents the spirit from lashing out against society and tames the wildness of the spirit. However, there are a variety of practices to soothe the host's possession, including music, food, gifts and/or sacrifices for the spirit. In some cases, these spirits demand these gifts and sacrifices as a way to lessen their effects on host or to lessen their wildness. Furthermore, in some cases the spirit requests items like blood, raw meat, or cologne. These demands for the illicit items become so great that soothers give in to spirit wishes, and the spirit then causes the host to commit a *shirk* action. Placating the spirit by giving into its illicit demands might calm the spirit's wildness, but this does not mean the textual tradition or orthodox Islamic authorities approve of the illicit action(s).

However, some Islamic spirit possession cults do not condone giving in to the spirits' illicit demands. Their soothing practices still focus on the spirit identification process, but these groups attempt to stay within prescribed boundaries of the textual tradition. One such spirit possession cult that practice in this manner is the Ahl-e Havan practitioners within Iran. The practitioners, known as a *mama* or *baba*, assess “the severity of the symptoms of the ritual candidate or the Winds [the spirit] suspected to be responsible for them.” Once they deem that the host was possessed, the first step is to isolate and purify the possessed host. Then the practitioner begins the next step:

The *baba* or *mama* direct the major rituals concerned with making the Winds ‘come under’ or reveal their identity in the speech and behavior of the possessed in trance. The Winds express in trance speech their complaints and terms for gaining satisfaction (usually gifts of clothing, food, jewelry or ‘punishments’); the ritual specialists translate the speech, if it is incomprehensible, and negotiate the nature of the settlement (how much to give and when to make the transaction).

While all rites serve as means of defining and structuring the relationships between man and spirits, congruent with differences in conceptualizations of the Winds, not all conform to the model described above. For example, some rituals are much closer in form to folk-Islamic patterns of worship, sacrifice, prayers and supplication, and pilgrimages to shrines and saints. Others are not elaborated beyond a few verbal or gestural utterances. Some have little to do with diagnosis or treatment of possession

⁶⁸ Erlmann, V. 1982: 4950

symptoms or the trance initiations -- for example, those concerning interactions or events among the possessed, such as the birth of a new child.⁶⁹

This process of identifying the spirit in the Ahl-e Hava spirit possession cult is key to the practitioner's treatment. Even though the spirits associated with the Ahl-e Hava spirit possession cult usually demand licit items, there are cases where the spirit demands blood and raw meat. Safa's article on Ahl-e Hava spirit possession cult in Iran clearly presents that this society seems not to condone giving into these illicit demands.⁷⁰ Lastly, as seen in previous examples, the practitioner negotiates an agreement, and "if the ritual is successful, the Wind relieves the possessed of their symptoms. This does not imply a terminal exorcism; however, this affliction may continue for the rest of the host's life, and it can be reactivated, especially in various rituals of the Ahl-e Hava."⁷¹

There are some cases where the soothsayer deems the spirit not to be a match to the host. Messing presented one such case, where he explains the practitioner has to study the *zar* spirit and the victim's social and economic status, in order to come to his final diagnosis. Messing suggest that the spirit has a socioeconomic class and the victim has a socioeconomic class, and their socioeconomic classes have to match for the possession to occur. If the possessed victim is of a low and poor class of society, then they and their *zar* spirit belong "to the class of 'pages serving great (*wureza*),' and these possessed victims "may work off their dues by 'serving the tray.'"⁷² In addition, if the practitioners deem the *zar* spirit to be too expensive for the possessed victim, because the practitioner might "overestimate a patient's financial position," he may 'transfer' his expensive *zar* to another devotee better able to bear the offerings demanded."⁷³ It is also possible the soother's action of transferring the spirit to a different host, who can afford the rich taste of the spirit, is done to prevent the spirit from becoming unruly and wild.

The *Ulama* or more orthodox authorities also practice soothing; however, their practices are slightly different. The *Ulama* use the words of the *Qur'an* as a way to soothe the spirit. The use and

⁶⁹ Safa, K. 1988: 87

⁷⁰ Safa, K. 1988: 90

⁷¹ Safa, K. 1988: 87

⁷² Messing, S. 1958: 1124

⁷³ Messing, S. 1958: 1124

recitation of the *Qur'an* and its *surahs* is key to the *Ulama's* soothing practices, since historical and anthropological sources do not identify or suggest that they give in to spirit possession demands.

In addition, considering the variety of rituals, actions, and practices associated with soothing, the relationship between the spirit, the practitioner, and the host's society represent a balance between condoning illicit action and preventing the manifestation of a potential threat to society's way of life and its worldview. The acts that give in to the illicit demands of the spirit serve to keep the spirit quiet and to diminish the threat to the authority of the soother and the society. This threat to authority could give rise a society's acceptance of soothing being a way to combat the spirit's potentially damaging effect on society. Furthermore, many of the spirit possession cults, such as those of Mayotte, believe that exorcism is not a cure, and the goal of the cult is to create a relationship between the host and the spirit.⁷⁴ This makes the negotiation process between the practitioner and the spirit over the spirit's demands extremely important, even if the *Ulama* doesn't condone illicit demands as society's way to combat the spirit's threat and prevent disorder.

Both the *Ulama* and the spirit possession practitioners use soothing as a way to combat possession. This research has shown that the spirit possession practitioners are a dominant force within the soothing practices. These soothing practices can give in to the illicit demands of the possession or can be "Islamized," as seen with the Ahl-e Hava practitioners. However, within Islam, David soothed the evil spirit in Saul through the magical playing of music, and this practice could be considered a *ruqyah* meaning "to charm [someone] by invoking Allah."⁷⁵ Philips stated,

Ruqyah is a 'charm or spell, either uttered or written, by which a person having an evil affection, such as fever and epilepsy etc., is charmed.'⁷⁶

The *ruqyah* is a way of attracting the spirit to behave or to soothe the possession. It is also a magical healing practice that will be discussed more in-depth later in this chapter. Susan O'Brien's mention of the *rukiyya* as a person suggests that the orthodox Islamic authorities can practice soothing through *ruqyah*.

⁷⁴ Lambek, M. 1980: 319

⁷⁵ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 128

⁷⁶ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 128

Converting the Spirit

Some spirit possession cults practice spirit conversion. The historical and anthropological literature presents two different forms of spirit conversion: conversion of the spirit from bad to good and conversion of the spirit from heathen to Muslim. These conversions center on the effects the Muslim and non-Muslims spirits have had on Muslim societies' beliefs and their practices. Safa's article states, "the symbolic world of the Ahl-e Hava is constituted by two primary fields of meaning: Islamic and non-Islamic. The world of the Winds replicates this basic opposition. Each category of Wind is identified as belonging primarily to one or the other, though they may share characteristics (semantic space) of the other."⁷⁷ The difference and similarities between the Muslim and non-Muslim has not changed the potential threat that the spirit possesses toward society and authority.⁷⁸ Each one of these three practices of spirit conversion occurs as a way to lessen or stop the spirit's illicit demands and its threat toward society, which means that Muslims conduct such practices for the same reasons they conduct soothing.

The first form of spirit conversion is associated with the practitioner's transformation of the spirit from bad to good in order to lessen the illicit demands of the spirit. We could consider these conversions of the bad spirit to a good spirit as transformations of the spirits within their societies and trying to differentiate between the soothsayer's practices of negotiation to get the spirit to behave within society and the transformation/conversion of the spirit. This is mainly because the majority of anthropologists' studies of Muslim spirit possession have been mainly associated with Muslim societies practicing soothsaying. However, a few studies have suggested the practice of transforming/converting of the spirit from bad to good also occurs.

The first example can be seen in Heike Behrend's book titled *Spirit possession, Modernity & Power*, where he explains that the "women convert those inauspicious wild powers into favorable domestic powers controlled by the village, and re-integrate them into the continuous circuit between life and death."⁷⁹ This idea of converting the "wild powers" into "favorable domestic powers" suggests the

⁷⁷ Safa, K. 1988: 90 & Matory J.L. 1994: 511

⁷⁸ Safa, K. 1988: 90

⁷⁹ Behrend, H. & U. Luig 1999: 84

conversion was of the spirit's actions, and with the idea that wild spirits pose a threat to society as a whole, this quote also suggests that the Muslims converted the spirit itself in order that it behaves, since a wild spirit is harder to negotiate with. Janet McIntosh's book titled *The Edge of Islam: Power, Personhood, and Ethnoreligious Boundaries on the Kenya Coast*, provides another examples as she explains that spirits are forced to convert among the Giriama, who historically were non-Muslim neighbors to Muslim Swalili, even though there are some spirits who willingly convert. She states,

It is ironic that, in their unconscious recognition of Swahili hegemony, possessed Giriama wind up practicing a version of Islam that stands in stark opposition to contemporary Swahili ideals of conversion and good Islamic practices. Instead of emerging from individual choice, forced conversion defers agency to the spirit. Instead of focusing on the supreme will of God, forced conversion neglects God altogether, treating a minor spirit as supreme controller. And instead of taking the form of an absolute transformation, an interior shift externally indexed by a signature in Kadhi's ledger book, forced conversion often places the host in an ambivalent state.⁸⁰

Her discussion focuses on the failed attempts of converting the spirit in order to have the spirit act and behave better, and she continues to explain that the legitimacy of the spirit conversion also depends on the host's intentions and beliefs. McIntosh's quote suggests that the idea that Muslims practice transforming/converting the spirit from bad to good can lead to the possessed host participating in Islamized practices in spite of being a "pagan". These practices might not be the best; however, society as a whole still seems to allow the shunned Islamized practices to occur. A possible reason for this kind of conversion to occur within an Islamic society is to allow the rest of the Muslims within the community to fully worship Allah. The possessed host who practices Islamized rituals is part of the larger community, which means the actions are only shunned. Furthermore, McIntosh's quote supports the idea that Muslims practice transforming/converting the spirit from bad to good as a reason to combat the possible threat of spirit possession within their societies.

The second form of spirit conversion is associated with the practitioner's transformation/conversion of the spirit heathen to a Muslim as a way to prevent the spirit from wanting, craving, or demanding illicit items, such as blood and cologne. Due to many of the anthropological studies of Muslim spirit possession's focus on the practice of soothsaying, there is not much on the conversion

⁸⁰ McIntosh, J. 2009: 171

process of a heathen spirit to a Muslim spirit. The few examples discovered in the research come from the Iranian Gulf Coast.

It is believed by some Muslim societies that a non-Muslim spirit can be converted into a Muslim spirit; however, this sometimes is not an easy process for the practitioner to conduct because “non-Muslim Winds [the spirit] are intrinsically wilder, unpredictable and unaccountable, difficult to negotiate with.” The heathen spirit’s reaction to ritual practices, especially its reactions toward “names or other expressions that refer to the Prophet,” can cause the furious Winds to break off negotiations.⁸¹ Safa explains this by stating,

The Noban [a class of spirit] are clearly more heathen than the Mashayekh [another class of spirit]. Their rituals of initiation- in which they are made to "fail" in the body of the possessed, communicate their identity, complaints, and demands, and bargain and negotiate for their satisfaction and the release of their host -- are almost identical with the rituals of the Zars. The difference lies largely in the evocations of the names of God and the prophets, including utterances of the *salvat* (the ritual formula "praise and greetings to God, Mohamad and his descendants"). The Mashayekh, while continuing many non-Islamic elements, are distinctly Islamic in their rituals, patterned more closely to the saint/shrine pilgrimage and worship.⁸²

Spirits are sometimes unwilling to change their wild ways through spirit possession practitioners’ practices, which includes spirit possession practitioners trying to soothe the spirit. These issues of the wildness of spirit sometimes being unwilling to change its behavior, could be a reason why Muslims believe it is necessary to convert the spirits to Islam.

The conversion of the possession to a Muslim is a way to stop the possessed person’s negative influence on society, which, in turn, is another way to prevent the spirit from wanting, craving, or demanding illicit items, such as blood and cologne. This is the most common form of conversion, and society and spirit drive this form of conversion. McIntosh states,

Unlike the short-lived trance possession brought about by drumming and dancing during diviners' spirit-propitiation rituals, possession by coercive Muslim spirits is a chronic state in which hosts go about their lives in a state of ordinary awareness while their bodies and actions are subject to the spirit's intervention. The condition of possession, then, blurs with the conditions of ordinary life, suffusing the latter with new meanings.⁸³

⁸¹ Safa, K. 1988: 90

⁸² Safa, K. 1988: 91

⁸³ McIntosh, J. 2004: 94

The spirit holds the host hostage until the host converts to Islam.⁸⁴ McIntosh further presents an example of this, by stating,

One diviner, a woman in her 30s, exemplifies this chronic state with some of the most common embodied symptoms of possession:

I'm planning to convert soon because of my Muslim spirits ... I know it's going to happen in the future ... I already have some of the signs. There are certain foods I don't eat, like bush rats or dead animals that haven't been properly slaughtered. If I eat those, I vomit and become ill for several days. And during Ramadan, the spirits force me to fast; I just don't feel hungry during the daytime, and get my hunger back at night. And if I work on Fridays, I get sick.⁸⁵

In addition, as the quote above shows, this idea of the host converting to Islam is an intriguing concept, since the hosts possessed by Muslim spirits, in many cases, grudgingly convert to Islam as a way to gain relief from the symptoms of the possession. This idea of conversion is also intriguing because within Islam beliefs, conversion to Islam while the host under distress from a spirit should not be allowed, since a Muslim must be able to worship Allah and be in the right mind frame for conversion to valid. However, as seen above, conversion occurs and it allows the Muslim spirit to reside in a Muslim host, probably making the situation for both the host and spirit better within their society.

Performing Magical Healing

Muslims developed the practice of magical healing as a way to deal with all problems, whether medical or supernatural. The Muslims consider exorcism a form of magical healing. In Smith-Savage's article titled *The Theory of Magic in Healing*, she states,

For magic was a means of forcing supernatural powers to fulfill a supplicant's desire, especially for healing. The use of such therapeutic magic by Muslims was sanctioned by Hadith if there was no harm in magical incantations that were employed for healing as long as they were not polytheistic.⁸⁶

During the medieval period, many Muslims thought that medicine was counter-sorcery, and "the Arabic word for medicine, *tibb*, often signified magic," *sihr*.⁸⁷ During this time, there were many magical texts written, "magical amulets and talismans—the 'technology' of spent magic."⁸⁸ During the Islamic era,

⁸⁴ McIntosh, J. 2004: 94

⁸⁵ McIntosh, J. 2004: 94

⁸⁶ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 87

⁸⁷ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 87 & Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 114

⁸⁸ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 88

Muslims were continually producing the magical healing material uninterruptedly and “gradually, as one would expect, an Islamic, or at least Arabic, element was added to the material and became predominant by the later Middle Ages.”⁸⁹ Smith-Savage states Muslim societies have magical beliefs and practices.⁹⁰ Muslims believe in both good and bad/evil magic; however, the Muslims do not practice bad/evil magic within Islam. Muslims consider magical healing a good use of magic, and “magic was usually a more forceful method of supplication or a supercharged prayer.”⁹¹

Dols discusses the Islamic magical healing practice through Ibn an-Nadim’s book titled *The Fihrist*, which he wrote between AD 987 and 1010. Dols summarizes Ibn an-Nadim’s views on “exorcists, jugglers, magicians, and those who use incantations [*an-niranjiyat*], tricks, and talismans” by stating the following:

The exorcists and magicians [*al-mu'azzimun was-sahara*] assert that the devils, *jinn*, and spirits [*ash-shayatin wal-jinn wal-arwah*] obey and serve them, being directed by their command and their prohibition. The exorcists, who pretend to observe the sacred laws, claim that this [power] is because of obedience to Allah, may His name be magnified.

Thus invocation is addressed to Him, and oaths by the spirits and devils are by His help, with the abandoning of lusts and by consequence of religious practices. Moreover, [they claim] that the *jinn* and the devils obey them, either because of obedience to Allah, may His name be magnified, or on account of [their making] oaths by Him, or else for fear of Him, blessed and exalted is He. For He has subjugated and humiliated them [the devils and *jinn*] by the potency of His holy names and because of mention of Him, uplifted and glorified is He.

The [other] magicians [*as-sahara*] assert that they enslave the devils by offerings and prohibitive acts. They [claim] that the devils are pleased by the committing of acts which are forbidden and which Allah, may His name be magnified, has prohibited. Thus the perpetrating of things such as abandoning prayer and fasting, permitting blood, marrying forbidden women, and other kinds of evil actions is also pleasing. This is common practice in Egypt and the nearby regions; the books which are written there are many and extant. The Babylon of the magicians is in the land of Egypt. A person who has seen this [state of affairs] has told me that there still remain men and women magicians and that all of the exorcists and magicians assert that they have seals, charms of paper, sandal, jazab, smoke, and other things used for their arts.⁹²

Dols' summary of Ibn an-Nadim explains that the licit or illicit Muslim magicians all claim to be effectively subjugating the spirit so the spirit will obey the magician’s will. It later explained that there is a belief that these illicit magicians or sorcerers offered “deeds that were displeasing to God” to the spirits

⁸⁹ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 88

⁹⁰ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 87

⁹¹ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 87

⁹² Dols, M. 2004: 90-91

in order to gain control of them and the development of this black magic came from Egypt.⁹³ Then, Dols explains, there are also magicians who use astrology and other occult sciences to make and employ talismans to deal with the *jinn*.⁹⁴

In Ahmed El-Safi's study titled *Native Medicine In The Sudan: Sources, Concept, and Methods*, which was considered by Muslims in the 14th century to be a magical healing text, he states that magical healing is an integral part of Sudanese native medicine practices, and he believes it is where the practices of magical healing began. El-Safi also states that Sudanese medicinal practices originated in Ancient Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon. The Ancient Egyptians believed the spirits of dead or divine beings caused suffering and weakened human beings. The Ancient Egyptians then used magical spells and incantations before a medical treatment, and "without them [magical spells and incantations] the remedies might well be useless and worse than useless."⁹⁵ The Ancient Egyptians used these magical spells and incantations coupled with superior medical knowledge to treat illness that might have been caused by spirits of dead or divine beings. El-Safi explains the Ancient Egyptians also used Amulets to protect people. He states,

The evil eye was also known and the exorcitory [sp.] and propitiatory arts have consequently flourished to banish or appease the possession malign power. Amulets of every type have been prescribed to bring luck or avert ill, even some of their women are called Astawarban or the averter of the evil eye.⁹⁶

In addition, El-Safi states that Assyria and Babylon medicinal practices contained magic, and some practices have been beneficial, while the majority have been harmful.

In addition, *Ruqyah* is another form of magical healing, which Muslims could use for good or bad "black magic." Philips quotes Al-Alusi while discussing the fact that real magic is a "product of satanic intervention" by stating,

What is meant by magic is an act which resembles a miracle but is not, because it [i.e., magic] is learned. And in order to perform it, the help of the devil is sought by pleasing him with abominable acts. [These acts may be in the form of] statements, like incantations containing phrases of *shirk* and praises of Satan; act like planet worship and

⁹³ Dols, M. 2004: 92

⁹⁴ Dols, M. 2004: 92

⁹⁵ El-Safi, A. 1970: 3

⁹⁶ El-Safi, A. 1970: 3

an adherence to crime and licentiousness; and beliefs, like the preference and love of what is necessary to please [the devil].⁹⁷

The *Qur'an*, in *surah* 113, informs Muslims to beware of the evil of malignant witchcraft, and shows that the *Ulama* approves of the good forms of magical healing since they felt that the bad forms were *shirk*. Philips further justifies the *Ulama's* belief through his explanation of his quote of *Sahih Muslim's Hadith*,

Muslim scholars have prohibited the use of incantations whose meaning are not understandable, because there is a possibility of *shirk* being involved, even if it is not so in actuality.

‘Awf ibn Malik al-Ashja’i said, ‘We used to make incantations during the time of Ignorance, so we said, O Messenger of Allah, what is your opinion on this matter? He replied, ‘Let me hear your incantations, for incantations which do not have *shirk* in them are fine.’

Most of what is recited by those preparing amulets and talismans have *shirk* in them. In an attempt to hide the *shirk*, *Qur'anic* verses are often added throughout the recitation.⁹⁸

As seen by the quote above, the *Ulama* does not approve of all of the practices in spirit possession, since they believe that the *Qur'an* itself holds all necessary power to heal and cure illnesses. In addition, Muslims sometimes couple magical healing with soothsaying and exorcism practices/rituals, possibly as a way to enhance the rituals. Magical healing practices also became a way to combat spirit possession, since Muslims think it is a way to soothe or cure illness. However, the *Ulama's* view of charms used to cure the sick or possessed, *nushrah*, and charms used to protect from the evil eye or diabolical possession, *ta'wīdh/ūdḥah/ma'ādḥah*, became corrupt through *shirk*.⁹⁹ In turn, the *Ulama* allowed permissible methods that "conform to the guidelines found in the sources of Islamic jurisprudence," as found in the orthodox Islamic authority's approved form of exorcism, to continue to be practiced. As stated by Philips,

In order for *ruqā* to be legitimate according to Islamic law, Ibn Hajar said, "the scholars are in unanimous agreement that *ruqā* is permissible if [the following] three conditions are met:

Only Allāh's word [i.e., the *Qur'an*], name or attributes can be used.

It must be in [comprehensible] Arabic or intelligible words in another language.

⁹⁷ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 124-125

⁹⁸ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 129

⁹⁹ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 128

Those taking part must believe that the incantation cannot have an independent effect, but it is Allāh who causes it to have effect.¹⁰⁰

As seen in the quote above, the *Ulama* have drawn a fine line between what it considers permissible and what it considers prohibited magical healing practices. If the magical healer is practicing *shirk*, such as being possessed or performing magical healing for monetary gain, the orthodox Islamic authorities consider their actions prohibited.

Furthermore, some *hadiths* state that unintelligible incantations are permissible since anyone who is able should help the sick, as seen in *Sahih Muslim's Hadith*:

He reported that when Allāh's Messenger prohibited incantation, the 'Amr ibn Hazm family came to him and said "We know an incantation which we used to recite for curing scorpion stings." They recited the incantation for him, and he said, "I do not see anything wrong with it. Whoever among you is able to help his brother should do so."¹⁰¹

With statements from *hadiths* like this, it is possible that Muslims could use other practices that help people without *shirk* to heal the sick. Statements like this from the *hadiths* could have supported continued practice of magical healing among spirit possession practitioners, regardless of whether the practice was illicit. With this in mind, the *Ulama* and spirit possession practitioners both use magical healing as a way to deal with or combat spirit possession.

Exorcising the Spirit

Philips openly states that there are two forms of exorcism; exorcism that uses permissible techniques primarily practiced by the *Ulama*, and exorcism that uses prohibited techniques primarily practiced by the practitioners.¹⁰² These exorcisms are the last way a Muslim can deal with *jinn* possession. Philips explains that in Islam it is mandatory for a Muslim to help a possessed Muslim. He quotes Ibn Taymiyyah by stating, "The fundamental principle on the basis of which this subject [i.e., exorcism] should be understood is that it may be permissible, recommended or even compulsory to defend or aid one who is possessed, because helping the oppressed is a duty according to one's ability."¹⁰³ Considering this quote in relation to *Sahih Muslim's* statement about one who is able to help should do so, it seems like Ibn

¹⁰⁰ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 131

¹⁰¹ *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 3 p. 1197, no. 5456

¹⁰² Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 129

¹⁰³ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 132

Taymiyyah might be referencing *Sahih Muslim*. It is also an obligation for Muslim who has the ability to help the possessed, as seen in Philips statement that,

As to leave one's [possessed] companion without treating him, it is the same as abandoning someone who is oppressed. Aiding the oppressed is *fard kifayah* (a group obligation) on everyone according to their ability, based upon what the Prophet was reported to have said,

‘A Muslim is a brother to every other Muslim, he does not leave him in harm nor does he harm him.’

If he is unable to help him or is busy with something more obligatory or someone else has gone to help the possessed individual, it is no longer obligatory on him to do so. If, on the other hand, he is the only one present who is able to help and he is not busy with something more obligatory, it then become a compulsory duty to exorcise the possessed.¹⁰⁴

Within the *Ulama*'s practice of exorcism, an exorcism must “fulfill certain spiritual and legal characteristics” and must occur under two circumstances; the possessed and exorcist must both have the strength to fight the spirit without being *shirk*, and must use the correct method of returning the possessed back to harmony.¹⁰⁵ Many of members of the *Ulama* believe that an evil charm could cause the possession, and in the case where the spirit used an evil charm to possess the host, the exorcist will begin the exorcism by undoing the evil charm. Then the exorcist will address the spirit and demand that it leave the host. If the *jinn* refuse to leave the host, the exorcist will then begin to use harsh language to curse the spirit as a way to provoke it to leave. If this does not work, the exorcist begins to recite verses of the *Qur'an* that Muslims believe heal and cure the sick, and according to Philips, the following verses have been used for this healing:

We revealed in stages of the Qur'an that which is a healing and mercy for believers. But for the unjust it only adds to their loss. Qur'an 17:82

O mankind, there has come to you [in the Qur'an] an admonition from your Lord and a healing for the [diseases] in your heart and, for the believer, a guidance and mercy. Qur'an 10:57¹⁰⁶

Further verses used in exorcism are as such,

If Satan touches you, seek refuge in Allah, for verily, he is the Hearer and Knower.
Qur'an 41:36

Say, ‘My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the prodding of the devils, and I seek refuge in You, my Lord, from their presence.’ Qur'an 23:97-98¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 133

¹⁰⁵ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 134

¹⁰⁶ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 139

In addition to the recitation of the verses above and the many others listed in Philip's book, exorcists can recite whole *surahs* of the *Qur'an*, such as *surah al-Fatihah* and *surah al-Baqarah*. However, Muslims state that Ayah al-Kursi, "verse of the Footstool," is one of the "greatest weapons which may be used to exorcise the *jinn*."¹⁰⁸ Next, the exorcist gives the host healing medicines of dates, truffles, and a bath, which Muslims consider one of the best forms of medicines since you are washing away the sickness.¹⁰⁹

The exorcist can also:

- Recite verses of the *Qur'an* while blowing over patient
- Recite verses of the *Qur'an* over water and olive oil, which then the patient drinks the water and someone rubs olive oil on the patient's aching limbs
- Make the patient unconscious by depressing his jugular vein, which forces the *jinn* to be exposed
- Trap the *jinn* within the host by wrapping the "forelock of the patient's hair around his finger"¹¹⁰
- Trap the *jinn* within the host by threading the patient's fingers and toes
- Give the patient an amulet to wear that contains verses of the *Qur'an*
- Give the patient an amulet, containing verses of the *Qur'an*, that can be burned and/or inhaled
- Summon the patient to prayer, *adhan*
- Use charms with "inscriptions from numerology and other occult sciences," which the patient wears, then washed; resulting in a solution imbibed in the patient's skin.¹¹¹

If all these steps fail to expel the spirit, the "exorcist may resort to striking the possessed individual in order to inflict pain on the possessing spirit and to elicit a response to commands, prayers or recitations."¹¹² These parts of the exorcism, as seen above, are important to the *Ulama* because it allows them to combat the illicit action through what could be considered orthodox scholastic magic.

Within the practitioners' practice of exorcism, there seem to be two reasons why it occurs. The first reason is to protect the spirit possession cult members from danger. As stated earlier, many of the spirit possession cults believe that the spirit never really leaves the possessed victim; therefore, the possessed victim has to appease the spirit, because the general rule of thumb in the spirit possession cults is that exorcism is not necessary if the spirit is not causing harm. However, some spirit possession cults

¹⁰⁷ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 139

¹⁰⁸ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 142

¹⁰⁹ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 152-153

¹¹⁰ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 169-170

¹¹¹ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 169-170

¹¹² Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 153

that believe and practice exorcisms, and these exorcisms only occur when the spirit will not negotiate and puts the host in mortal danger. When exorcisms do occur, Messing states, “Such exorcism is accomplished by transferring the spirit to a place near a path in the bush where he can pounce on some unsuspecting stranger. The doctor then assigns his patient another *zar* as a protective spirit from among the *zars* who are currently available in the house of the *zar* society and without ‘horses’ to serve them.”¹¹³ As seen in this quote, once the spirit chooses to possess the host, the cult member will assign a new spirit. The cult makes being possessed a right of the member, and in many cases this allows the member to be unique.

The second reason an exorcism could occur is to protect the established authorities from the threat of the possessed person. As stated previously, spirit possession could play “a significant part in the enhancement of status,” and a person with a lower rank within society to gain political advancement within a religious society could use possession.¹¹⁴ This dislike of spirit possessions and the Islamic leadership’s need to control the threat of the possession to protect the core of Islam, Allah oneness, uniqueness of divinity, and authority of God is the main reason that the Islamic leadership combats the illicit actions and the spirit through exorcism. We can see this threat further in an Islamic *rukiyya* (spirit exorcism) statement, “there is a cure for every illness in the Holy Qur’an. What cannot be cured by the Qur’an cannot be cured... Most of the illnesses of the human body, up to ninety-percent are caused by the spirits, and are meant to prevent you from worshiping God fully.”¹¹⁵ This statement means, if a spirit can prevent a Muslim from fully devoting himself/herself to the unity of Allah (*tawhid*, the oneness of God), then the spirit is causing the Muslim to commit *shirk* (an action that opposes the unity, uniqueness, and authority of Allah).

Isolating the Spirit

Lastly, the Muslims can combat the threat of spirit possession through isolating or ostracizing the host when all other methods to deal with the spirit threat have failed. Isolation of the spirit has occurred in

¹¹³ Messing, S. 1958: 1124

¹¹⁴ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 114 & 125

¹¹⁵ O’Brien, S. 2001: 229

the area around the Persian Gulf where Muslims practice the Ahl-e Hava.¹¹⁶ As stated earlier in this chapter, it is not good to leave a possessed person alone without treatment; however, when treatment does not work, isolation of the wild spirit is the last way to protect society and diminish the threat the spirit possession poses to authority. Safa explains when all methods have not changed behavior or expelled the harmful spirit from the host then leaving the host “in a state of *tahran*, a condition in which all hopes of controlling the possessing Wind [spirit] are lost,” the practitioner can decide to ostracize or isolate the spirit so it will die. This means the host is ostracized or isolated from his community, and it means the community leaves the host to die as well. This practice seems somewhat counterintuitive to what Ummah stands for, and to the community unified in their beliefs. However, when a wild untamable spirit threatens the community, this practice then become reasonable. This is an extreme practice since the reason that the majority of spirit possession cults exist is to help the hosts deal with their possession.

Appeasing the Spirit

The established spirit possession authorities, as ways to tame the wildness of the spirit, conduct all of these spirit possession practices, and as seen above these practices contain licit and illicit practices. These practices, with the exception of exorcism and spirit isolation, have to occur continuously in order to keep the spirit appeased. This continuous appeasement of the spirit and the illness it causes, by giving into the illicit, has led many orthodox Muslims to view these practices as *shirk*. The orthodox often feel they cannot excuse the possessed host’s actions, willingly or unwillingly, to partake in the *haram* (wrongful and banned) practices of drinking blood or any intoxicating substance, eating raw meat, or wearing blood. Considering the fact that the practices discussed above include illicit practices, it becomes important to discuss why many Muslims and the *Ulama* view many of these illicit practices as *haram*, how these practices could affect and threaten their understanding of the concept of *tawhid*, and why Muslims negotiate the licit and illicit.

SPIRIT POSSESSION & NEGOTIATION OF THE LICIT & ILLICIT

¹¹⁶ Safa, K. 1988: 90

Islam is a religion of ortho-praxy, where a Muslim only becomes a Muslim through his/her actions and these actions should always reflect the oneness of Allah.¹¹⁷ It is of the utmost importance that a Muslim ensures that all Islamic ritual actions, when observed, reinforce what is sacred, oneness of Allah, as well as social and cultural bond of participants. This goal, to preserve the oneness of Allah, leads every Muslim down a path where they have to constantly negotiate between the licit and illicit. This is the case for all Islamic ritual actions, including the core Islamic ritual actions, the five pillars: *Shahādah* (Profession of faith), *Salat* (Prayer), *Sawm* (Fasting during Ramadan), *Hajj* (Pilgrimage to Mecca) and *Zakāt* (Paying of alms, giving to the poor). All Muslim ritual practices reflect a Muslim's belief in the sacred -- the oneness of God. With *tawhid* being one of the major concepts defining Islam, with its origin within the *Qur'an*, it is the core of all Islamic religious knowledge, as well as its history, metaphysics, esthetics, ethics, social order, and economic order. Muslims developed this concept as a defense mechanism to prevent the foreign influences spoiling Islam's monotheistic beliefs.¹¹⁸ *Tawhid* is not simple monotheism, but it permeates every aspect of Islam, including every ritual action or practice, including the Five Pillars of Islam, as the outward embodiment of the inward religion.

Even though there are significant divisions found within Islam, the five pillars have a unifying effect by bringing doctrine, ideology, and the global Islamic society closer to *tawhid*. With this in mind, a short discussion of the Five Pillars seems necessary as a way of defining what Muslims and *Ulama* consider to be appropriate or licit Islamic practices before one can understand what is considered to be illicit practices.

1. *Shahādah* is the Muslim declaration of belief in the oneness of God and in Muhammad as his final prophet. Recitation of the *shahādah* occurs when an individual converts to Islam, and this profession of faith, which a Muslim typically states before praying, becomes a daily reminder. A Muslim expresses his/her faith by stating:

*Ash-hadu anla ilaha illal-Lahu Wahdahu la Sharika Lahu wa-ash-hadu
anna Muhammadan abduhu wa rasuluhu.*

(I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, the One,
without any partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and

¹¹⁷ Varisco, D. M. 2005: 164 & Starrett, G. 1995: 964

¹¹⁸ Abul A'La Mawdudi. Accessed online on 7 Aug 2011.

His Messenger.)¹¹⁹

There is one major idea that comes out of the first part of *shahādah*: a Muslim belief in the unity of Allah – that is, his oneness (*tawhid*). Therefore, they acknowledge and accept that Allah is the only God, and only master, Lord and ruler with no partner sharing in any way His being, powers and attributes. This is the key to the Muslim faith. Unless one observes this, one cannot be a Muslim. The second part of *shahādah* reinforces the first part, in which Allah is the only Supreme Being with no partners, and obeying and following the advice of the Prophet Muhammad is equally important to the belief in absolute Unity of Allah. This declaration of One God, and the Prophet Muhammad being his last messenger, makes anyone who declares it in complete submission of Allah's will a Muslim.¹²⁰

2. *Salat* is a Muslim's duty to pray five times a day, and it is integral to Muslim unity, not only in relation to other Muslims but also to Allah. All Muslims generally pray the same way even if they come from different cultures or attend a different Mosque. Prayers break through cultural barriers, giving every Muslim a common ground of worship. All prayers start with the Muslim performing the ritual ablution (*wadzu*'), which purifies the body by removing one's sin and allowing the Muslim to worship Allah. Muslims deem this necessary to not only cleanse and purify the body, but also to cleanse and purify the soul.
3. *Sawm* is the Muslim's duty to abstain from eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse from dawn (*fajr*) to sunset (*maghrib*), especially during Ramadan. Fasting is to sympathize with those less fortunate ones who do not always have food and drink readily available and also is viewed as a means of controlling one's desires (of hunger, thirst, sexuality, etc.). Fasting is not confined to the ninth Islamic holy month of Ramadan, but the month of Ramadan fasting is considered obligatory.
4. *Hajj*, a pilgrimage to Mecca, is another Muslim duty. Every Muslim should perform *Hajj* at least once during the worshiper's lifetime by traveling to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The *hajj* consists of many ceremonies, or rituals, which symbolize the essential concepts of the Islamic faith but also commemorate the trials of the Prophet Ibrahim and his family. The Prophet Muhammad had stated that a person who performs the *hajj* properly 'will return as a newly born baby (free of all sins)'.¹²¹
5. *Zakāt* (Paying of alms, giving to the poor) is an obligation for Muslims to pay 2.5% of their wealth to specified categories in society when their annual wealth exceeds a certain level. This 2.5% is giving to persons or causes that Allah mentioned in the *Qur'an*, to bring the community together to help the poor, the needy, to pay the salaries of those collecting it, to free captives and debtors, for travelers in need, and for other causes of Allah.¹²²

As seen from the example of the five pillars and the *Qur'an*, *tawhid* is the doctrine that defines Islam. *Tawhid* is the outward embodiment of the inward religion and it is the core of all Islamic religious practice, as well as its history, metaphysics, esthetics, ethics, social order, and economic order. *Tawhid* gives the sacred things in Islam their ultimate meanings and reinforces what is sacred, as well as social and cultural bonds of worshipers, and which carries powerful emotional force. Since *tawhid* underlies the intents in the worshiper's heart to do any act of worship for the sake of Allah and is connected to all rituals, it explains how to negotiate the licit and illicit actions and it provides a window into the

¹¹⁹ Whelan, E. 1998: 4

¹²⁰ Whelan, E. 1998: 4-6

¹²¹ The Hajj, 2011: Accessed on Nov 2011 & Esposito, J. Vol 2 2004: 89

¹²² Qur'an 9:60

understanding of the Islamic worldview.

The practice of these five pillars is the same throughout every denomination and school of thought within Islam; however, this is not the case for all ritual actions within Islam, especially those associated with spirit possession. As seen in Chapter 1, it was stated that the *jinn* have desires, such as eating and drinking, and the *jinn*'s desires can cause the possessed person to participate, willingly or not, in actions that are illicit in their religion. Understanding that Muslims view the *Qur'an* as a guide to what is considered appropriate or illicit practices or actions, the *Qur'an* prescribes Muslims to avoid the illicit actions -- since partaking in illicit actions would be *shirk*. Nonetheless, these illicit actions still occur, even if many Muslims feel that these actions are *shirk*. So what makes many illicit practices illicit within Islam?

The *jinn* desires to eat and drink and many Muslims believe the *jinn*'s favorite food is raw meat and their favorite drink is fresh blood, both of which Muslims consider to be forbidden (*haram*).¹²³ However, the spirit's desire for the illicit actions overpowers the human's desire not to partake in the action, like drinking blood. We can see this desire and action of the *jinn*, in drinking blood, directly and indirectly in both historical and anthropological works discussing Islamic spirit possession. Anthropologists, like Natvig, do not directly show that all spirits prefer to drink blood through statements as seen Chapter 1, where he discusses the cult member indirectly consuming blood.¹²⁴ We can further see the *jinn*'s taste for raw meat and blood in the fact that Natvig's account of Krapf's missionary records does not state anything about cooking the hen before the afflicted person eats the brain or before 'the assistants' eat the rest of the hen.¹²⁵ Considering that the woman referenced above is possessed by a spirit, this desire for the spirit to eat raw brains was satisfied and led to the spirit being soothed. This desire for raw meat seems odd to what the *Ulama* would consider to be appropriate, so why do the Islamic orthodox Islamic authorities feel the practice/act of drinking blood or eating raw meat is *shirk*?

As mentioned earlier, the *Qur'an* and many of the *hadiths* convey the idea that Islam forbids the act of drinking blood or eating raw meat. These acts go against the *Qur'an*'s dictation

¹²³ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 10-11; Lambek, M. 1981: 37

¹²⁴ Natvig, R. 1987: 681

¹²⁵ Natvig, R. 1987: 681

that food and drink should be lawful, as seen through the statement “O men, eat the lawful and good things from what is in the earth.”¹²⁶ The *Qur'an* continues to explain that Muslims should not purposely partake in unlawful and forbidden by stating;

He hath only forbidden you dead meat, and blood, and the flesh of swine, and that on which any other name hath been invoked besides that of Allah. But if one is forced by necessity, without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits,- then is he guiltless. For Allah is Oft-forgiving Most Merciful.¹²⁷

Another statement from the *Qur'an* clarifies this, and it states, “Eat not of (meats) on which Allah's name hath not been pronounced: That would be impiety. But the evil ones ever inspire their friends to contend with you if ye were to obey them, ye would indeed be Pagans.”¹²⁸ Furthermore, within the modern *zar* cult, the practice of drinking blood is not the only unlawful desire/practice occurring; there are some spirits who desire the raw meat. Natvig explains this by stating,

The Egyptian *zar* cult ... [sacrifices animals] while the spirits are ritually possessing the person, in order that they may partake directly of the sacrifice, when the blood is poured over the possessed person, who lets the blood soak into the clothes, rubs it into the skin, and rarely today than formerly, drinks some of the blood. Certain parts of the sacrificial animal are also set aside for the possessed person – i.e. the spirit – while the rest is shared between the *zar* leader, his or her assistants, cult members, and other guest at the ceremony. The parts reserved for the possessed person may be the brain, the eyes, tongue, or stomach, according to the demands of the possessing spirit.¹²⁹

Considering this quote, there is no statement that they cooked the sacrificial animal, so it still is possible that meat is raw. This shows another example of the spirit's desire for raw meat and blood, because other possessed members of the cult, who are also probably possessed by spirits through cult membership, partake in eating raw meat. Overall, this modification of the ritual, from drinking blood to eating raw meat, according to Natvig, would also be considered a *shirk* action, as seen in earlier quotes from the *Qur'an*. These quotes present that the practices of drinking blood or eating raw meat goes against the oneness of God, *tawhid*, since Allah was the one who told the Muslims not to partake in the practice.

Further examination of Natvig's quote “in order that they may partake directly of the sacrifice, when the blood is poured over the possessed person, who lets the blood soak into the clothes, rubs it into

¹²⁶ Qur'an 2:168

¹²⁷ Qur'an 2:173

¹²⁸ Qur'an 6:121

¹²⁹ Natvig, R. 1987: 682-683

the skin,” one notices that covering him/herself with blood has taken another importance, cleanliness. Islamic textual tradition presents a theme of ritual purity, regulating proper and appropriate food, drink, clothing, bathing and other such physical and moral items. Acknowledging the fact that bathing is an integral part of preparing for prayer, blood as a whole, bleeding, or even wearing blood is considered *haram* and goes against the principles of cleanliness essential to the practice of Islam. This idea further expanded in the *Qur'an*, where it is stated;

And they ask you about menstruation. Say: It is a discomfort; therefore keep aloof from the women during the menstrual discharge and do not go near them until they have become clean; then when they have cleansed themselves, go in to them as Allah has commanded you; surely Allah loves those who turn much (to Him), and He loves those who purify themselves.¹³⁰

This example explains that men are supposed to stay away from women who are menstruating, because they could get blood on themselves, which could cause their actions, especially prayer and ablutions to be negated, which could be *shirk*. The rule of *namaz*, prayer also shows this when it states,

If a person sees blood on his body or dress, and is certain that it is not one of the najis bloods, like, if he is sure that it is the blood of a mosquito, and if after offering the prayers, he learns that it was one of those bloods with which prayers cannot be offered, his prayers are in order. 817.

If a person is sure that the blood which is on his body or dress, is a type of najis blood which is allowed in *namaz*, like, the blood from wound or a sore, but comes to know after having offered his prayers, that it is the blood which makes prayers void, his prayers will be in order. 818.¹³¹

Furthermore, Sheikh Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid, on his webpage, states,

Some scholars said that it is disliked to eat raw meat, but the correct view is that it is permissible, on the basis of the principle that all things are permitted except those which have been expressly forbidden. There is no evidence to suggest that this is forbidden, but it is allowed on the condition that no harm is caused to the person who eats it – in which case it would not be allowed, because everything that causes harm is *haram*, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “... and do not throw yourselves into destruction...” [al-Baqarah 2:195].¹³²

All of these quotes continue to emphasize that if a Muslim has blood on him/her, whether his/her own or that of someone else, or is bleeding, then his/her actions are unclean. With this in mind, the orthodox Islamic authorities could view the practice of pouring blood over the possessed person, letting the blood

¹³⁰ Qur'an: 2:222

¹³¹ Rules of Namaz Parts 1-3. Accessed on 9/10/2011.

¹³² Al- Munajjid, M. S.: Fatwa 1924 Accessed on Nov 2011

soak into their clothes, and rubbing it into their skin as being *shirk* action, and any action/ritual the possessed person partakes in or completes while covered in blood, was not done with the intention for God.

Lastly, the more recent anthropological studies in the 1990's have presented the *jinn* desiring to drink other substances, like cologne. Many colognes throughout the world are alcohol based, or contain alcohol, and alcohol in any form, whether drank or worn, is considered illicit intoxicant and *haram*. Maulana Muhammad Ali states, "the drink prohibited in the *Qur'an* is described under the name *khamr*," which is "any intoxicating thing that clouds or obscures the intellect."¹³³ We can see this desire of a spirit to drink cologne, even though Islam forbids it in Lambek's research, where he states:

Mze Bunu [the spirit] then rose and went to fetch a bottle of cologne from which he began to take swigs. He tried to tempt a couple of Mohedja's [the spirit's host] small grandchildren (who were playing in a corner of the room) to try some, but they refused. One little girl had cut her finger while peeling sugar cane, and Mze Bunu remarked that the blood would also taste good... After some idle talk, during which I pondered the story, Mze Bunu finally left, saying that he was afraid if he stayed he would finish the entire bottle of cologne. But, the spirit suggested in parting, perhaps I would soon give him a gift of another bottle.¹³⁴

This desire to drink cologne, as seen in the quote above, seems strange since cologne is an undrinkable item, so why is the spirit drinking cologne, and what makes the cologne significant?

In Lambek's larger study of Islamic spirit possession practiced on the island of Mayotte, titled *Human Spirits: A Cultural Account of Trance in Mayotte*, Lambek further expounds on the significance of the bottle of cologne. He explains that cologne has an alcohol in it, and the spirit, not the host, is the only one who can feel the effects of the alcohol. However, Lambek states, "In sharp contrast to the spirits, humans consider cologne undrinkable, both by definition and proscription (because of its alcohol content)," even though, the *patros*, a class of spirits, drinks the cologne in "private occasion and during public ceremonies, where it is a necessary ingredient."¹³⁵ This practice is another that orthodox Islamic authorities would consider *haram*, because what the *Qur'an* forbids alcohol.

¹³³ Muhammad Ali, M. 2005: 544

¹³⁴ Lambek, M. 1980: 320-321

¹³⁵ Lambek, M. 1981: 36-37

The majority of the cologne on the market is alcohol based, unless you buy *halal* (permitted) cologne. By using or drinking cologne that is alcohol based, many Muslims believe they cannot perform *salat*, since the *Qur'an* states,

O ye who believe! Strong drink and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are only an infamy of Satan's handiwork. Leave it aside in order that ye may succeed.

Satan seeketh only to cast among you enmity and hatred by means of strong drink and games of chance, and to turn you from remembrance of Allah and from (His) worship. Will ye then have done?¹³⁶

This idea that being unclean prevents a Muslim from worshiping Allah is further explained in another statement found in the *Qur'an*, which states,

O you who believe! do not go near prayer when you are Intoxicated until you know (well) what you say, nor when you are under an obligation to perform a bath-- unless (you are) traveling on the road-- until you have washed yourselves; and if you are sick, or on a journey, or one of you come from the privy or you have touched the women, and you cannot find water, betake yourselves to pure earth, then wipe your faces and your hands; surely Allah is Pardoning, Forgiving.¹³⁷

The patros' practice of drinking the cologne to become intoxicated, as seen in the quotes above, places the host in a position where they are unclean and unable to worship God, since the act of being intoxicated prevents the host from performing proper *salat*.

In many cases discussed above and the many other illicit actions not mentioned, a Muslim who partakes in illicit action is walking a very fine line, because the textual traditions forbid these actions, even if their societies allow the practice to occur. This line, of not allowing forbidden actions to occur and protecting society from threat of spirit possession, is crossed, in some cases, since spirit possession has to be dealt with. As seen in Lambek's study and Kaveh Safa's study of the Iranian spirit possession cult known as the Ahl-e Hava, The People of the Air, the *vanshi*, wild, Zars, like the Maturi, demand blood or other illicit things.¹³⁸ The spirit's wild demand or desire for the illicit things, coupled with the fact that the possession, manifested as illness or not, prevents the host from fulfilling worship of Allah. This wildness has become a concern for *Ulama* and the majority of the spirit possession cults, because the wild spirits are "considered dangerous and potentially contagious." In addition, as stated by I.M. Lewis, spirit possession

¹³⁶ Qur'an: 5:90 & 5:91

¹³⁷ Qur'an: 4:43

¹³⁸ Safa, K. 1988: 89-90

poses a threat to the “established ecclesiastical authority.”¹³⁹ Considering the possible threat the wild spirit could have on the *Ulama* or the spirit possession cult, the development of a variety of spirit possession practices, some of which do give into the illicit demands, are a way of preventing problems with society and threatening the established authorities.

With this in mind, many of the possessed and practitioners’ choices to drink blood and cologne are considered by the *Ulama* to be *shirk*, because their actions do not reinforce the sacred and go against what is prescribed in the *Qur’an*. However, Muslims, even with their understanding of what is right or wrong and what reinforces the oneness of Allah, still choose to perform these practices, in turn negotiating a fine line between what is considered licit and illicit. With each authority, *Ulama* and spirit possession practitioners, choices associated with negotiation of licit and illicit have led to development many practices to deal with society’s problems. This understanding of why the authorities choose to do what they do will further explain development of variation in Islamic spirit possession practices.

THE JUSTIFICATION FOR SPIRIT POSSESSION APPREHENSIVENESS

We can look at these aforementioned spirit possession treatments in a different way, since spirit possession’s evil nature has led many Muslims to develop treatments to combat it. As stated throughout this chapter, there is a Muslim belief in spirit possession, and it is pervasive in historical and anthropological sources that there are many ways to deal with spirit possession. The known spirit possession authorities, the *Ulama* and spirit possession practitioners, have developed many practices to combat spirit possession, and both have done so to combat potential misbehavior of the possessed. Both authorities view spirit possession as a possible threat to their authority and their society's worldviews. In addition, these authorities within spirit possession practice a variety of methods to combat the threat of possession. However, both authorities seem to share a similar rationale for choosing to combat the threat of possession on their authority and the misbehavior that can cause a development of heresy and the changing of their worldview. Overall, it seems that combating spirit possession through split authority is better than alternative -- religious chaos.

¹³⁹ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 15

The practitioners within the spirit possession cults, in many cases, do not directly come out and state that they mean their practices to help and to keep a society's social order and worldview, but their practice represents this goal. Considering the statement that a spirit can prevent a Muslim from fully devoting him/herself to the unity of Allah, *tawhid*, causing him/her to commit *shirk* actions, and the idea that possession poses a threat to the authority of the *Ulama*, the practitioners combat illicit action and misbehavior. We can see this in Boddy, Natvig, and many others' writing about spirit possession practitioners and cults. By giving in to the spirit's demands, illicit or not, converting the spirit or host, healing the host and illness caused by the spirit, exorcising the spirit out of the host, or excluding the possessed from society, the spirit possession practitioners actions all reflect the desire to control the behavior of the possessed. The threat possessed by the spirit cannot only affect the authority of the practitioners, as well as the integrity of a Muslim, but can also affect the cult member's perceptions of their world and their place in society. By controlling the misbehavior of the spirit and host, even through illicit actions or practices, the practitioner has the ability to shape the behavior of the possessed, whether temporarily or permanently.

The *Ulama* chooses to combat spirit possession for many of the same reasons. As seen above, many historical and anthropological studies state that Muslims in spirit possession cults drink blood/cologne or cover themselves in blood. Nonetheless, the *Ulama* feels that these practices intentionally go against what the *Qur'an* states to be acceptable behavior and against God's will. In addition, the illness that the spirits cause to the hosts prevents the hosts from fully worshiping God. The *Qur'an's* statement that a Muslim cannot drink blood/cologne, cover him/herself in blood, or worship God while they are sick, further supports the orthodox Islamic authority's claim that spirit possession causes the host to commit *shirk* actions. Additionally, these practices also affect and prevent the host from performing the Five Pillars of Islam:

1. *Shahādah*: Since possession causes the host not to be in his/her right mind, the possession causes the host to commit *shirk* actions just through the fact the host is possessed. Since the possessed spirit can command the host to convert to Islam or a possessed host can convert to Islam, the act of the possessed host reciting the *shahādah* would be considered *shirk*. Since the *Ulama* feels that the possession causes the host not to act in their right mind, and act of converting to Islam must occur while a person is in their right mind.

2. *Salat*: It is a Muslim's duty to pray five times a day since the act is integral to Muslim unity, not only to other Muslims but also to Allah. The possession cause the host to be considered unclean, whether through the illness the spirit causes within the host or through the host's actions, such as drinking blood/cologne or covering themselves in blood. This uncleanness prevents the host from being able to pray, or, if he/she does pray, it causes his/her prayers to be *shirk*. The *Qur'an* further states that Muslim who accidentally consumes alcohol or is sick cannot pray while they are. Once it is believed the alcohol left the Muslims system or they are not sick, the Muslim must clean themselves and perform a *wadhu*'.¹⁴⁰ Considering the fact what the textual tradition states, when the host is possessed, the *Ulama* would consider the possessed host's prayers *shirk* actions.
3. *Sawm*: It is a duty to fast by abstaining from eating, drinking, and sexual intercourse from dawn (*fajr*) to sunset (*maghrib*) especially during Ramadan. When a Muslim is ill, he/she cannot fast; therefore, the host's illness of possession prevents him/her from fasting.
4. *Hajj*: The pilgrimage to Mecca for prayer rituals should be performed once within a Muslim's lifetime; however, spirit possession prevents the Muslim host from performing the *hajj* because they cannot pray without causing a *shirk* action. The *Ulama* believes the possessed host does not have the right state mind to perform the *ihram* (ritual prayer to bring the worshiper to a state of sacredness) or to recite the *talbiyah* (ritual prayer only recited during *Hajj*) or *niyyah* (intention for any action to be done for Allah).¹⁴¹ The *Ulama* can consider the possessed host performing *hajj* as performing *hajj* for the spirit, which goes against the *fatwa* banning someone from offering *hajj* for someone else.¹⁴² In addition, the illness that the spirit causes prevents the host performing *hajj*, since the *Ulama* feels a person performing *hajj* should be free of physical illness that causes the Muslim not to be in the right mind.
5. *Zakāt*: The possessed host and his/her family spend a great deal of money combating the possession, while likely puts a strain on their ability to pay 2.5% of their wealth as prescribed in the *Qur'an*. The conditions that *zakāt* is given to the poor includes that the person giving the *zakāt* is sane and is in the right frame of mind; however, the *Ulama* feels that a possessed host cannot fully worship God, which means he/she is not in the right mind to give *zakāt*.¹⁴³

Since spirit possession affects the Muslim host's ability to perform the five pillars, as the *Ulama* and the Islamic textual tradition state, it further supports the *Ulama's* interpretation of possession preventing the host from fully worshipping God.

Even though the *Ulama* feel that possession prevents a Muslim from being able to fully worship Allah, it is still a problem within Islamic society that must be dealt with. Philips states,

There are sufficient cures prescribed by Allah and His Prophet to remove and need for method involving *shirk* and any need for those who practice it. Some Muslims may dispute the permissibility of using medicines containing forbidden substances like pork and part of animals which die of themselves. However, there is no difference of opinion with regard to the prohibition of treating sickness with acts of *shirk* and *kufir* [disbelief], because it is prohibited under all circumstances. Performing acts of *shirk* and *kufir* are not only the same as only saying statements to that effects under duress, for the latter is allowed if one's heart is full of faith.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Qur'an 4:43 & Gauvain, R. 2005: 431

¹⁴¹ Gauvain, R. 2005: 430 & Wheeler, B. 2004: 109 & Esposito, J. Vol 2 2004: 89

¹⁴² Ibn Baz. Accessed on Nov 2011.

¹⁴³ International Islamic Web: Accessed on Nov 2011

¹⁴⁴ Bilal Philips, A. A. 2007: 129-130

Muslims view any action that goes against *tawhid* as a threat to the *Ulama*, and knowing that spirit possession causes the Muslim host to misbehave, the textual tradition and *Ulama* have developed approved methods to combat spirit possession. This misbehavior and the threat of the possessed host are the main reasons why the *Ulama* have chosen to combat spirit possession.

In addition, spirit possession's evil nature and *Ulama's* view that spirit possession poses a threat to society, the treatment of spirit possession is critical. When considering this idea and the aforementioned treatments, it becomes noticeable that there is a hierarchal order based on what the *Ulama* would consider the most authoritative path for treatment:

1. *Avoid the Spirit*: The act of avoiding spirits and places where Muslims can become possessed is one of best preventive actions a Muslim can take. There are many books and resources available to Muslims that help a Muslim avoid spirits, such as Waheed Abdussalam Baly's book titled *How to Protect Yourself from Jinn and Shaytaan*. This book also comes with a CD with a statement written on it "How to use the CD: 1. Have complete trust in Allah, 2. Use the headphone, 3. Listen once in the morning and once in the evening." By avoiding the spirit and the possibility of being possessed, a Muslim is doing the best thing he/she can to uphold the oneness of Allah.
2. *Prayers and Qur'anic Cures*: Muslims believe the sacred words found in the *Qur'an* can cure illness. These cures hold strong powers, which Muslims use when they cannot avoid spirits and spirit possession. Prayer and *Qur'anic* cures are the second best thing a Muslim can do to return to a state of *tawhid*.
3. *Placating and Negotiating*: As long as placating and negotiating do not give in to the illicit actions, they are both ways of dealing with spirit possession and the spirit's behavior. Placating and sacrificing are two major components to soothing practices, and these practices are key to the treatment of spirit possession. Soothing practices are normally associated with societies that believe exorcism is not a cure, and the goal is to create a relationship between the host and the spirit. The *Ulama* can easily couple their use of soothing practices with prayers and *Qur'anic* cures as this is their form of soothing a spirit. However, even though the *Ulama* do not perform or give in to the spirit's placation and negotiation process, they allow the practice of soothing to occur. With this in mind, *Ulama* might not want to get their hands dirty with the practice of placation and negotiation and this might be a reason why they grudgingly deal with spirit possession practitioners, even though their practices can go against the oneness of Allah.
4. *Abandoning the Spirit*: This act of abandoning the spirit and host is an extreme last line of defense practice, because the *Ummah* does not just exclude a Muslim from the community without a very good reason. The isolating or ostracizing of the host only occurs when all other methods to deal with the spirit threat have failed.

The *Ulama* reluctantly deal with spirit possession, and they try to use the Islamic practices first; which are avoiding spirits and its habitats; resorting to prayer or *Qur'anic* cures, as seen in Islamic exorcisms and magical healing; placating and sacrifice to spirit trying to avoid the illicit action; and/or abandoning the spirit and host.

These two authorities, the *Ulama* and the spirit possession practitioners, as seen in the

aforementioned information, have a variety of ways to negotiate with or combat the spirits. Historical and anthropological sources have both suggested there are two major competing categories of authorities who deal with Islamic spirit possession: one is the orthodox '*Ulama*' tradition, and the other is associated with spirit possession cults. These sources tend to draw their authorities from two different but major sources, the textual tradition and the knowledge and interaction with the supernatural. Even with the difference in the authorities' interpretations of the world around them, they both negotiate a fine line between the licit and illicit actions. When the spirit possession practitioner crosses the line into illicit practices, the whole of Muslim society does not rebel against them nor do they completely shun them. This act of giving into the illicit action possibly occurs, even when many consider the action *haram* or *shirk*, because it is a way to protect society, the authority, and most importantly the religion of Islam itself. This, in turn, further explains the importance of O'Brien quoting the *rukiyya*, since the illness of spirit possession has to be dealt with so a possessed Muslim, proper or not in their actions, can eventually worship God fully or society's worshipping of God is not threatened by an untamable wildness.

NEGOTIATION OF THE LICIT & ILLICIT ACTION: THERE IS MORE TO AUTHORITY THEN WHAT MEETS THE EYE

Although the *Ulama* consider many of the spirit possession practitioners' practices to be *shirk*, these illicit practices are in a way allowed to occur within Muslim society. Additionally, there are so many different ways to deal with the threat spirit possession possess on the host and society. The examination into Islam's negotiation of the licit and illicit actions explains some reasons why there are a number of local variations in Islamic practice, when all Muslims define their belief through a shared common foundation in this textual tradition, as found in the *Qur'an*. However, it has also led to concern about the effects of having two dueling spheres of authority and their interpretations on what they consider proper Islamic ritual action.

These authorities have competing ideas on how to deal with a possessed individual based on their understanding of the Islamic textual tradition and supernatural world. Moreover, these differences in authority interpretation on whether one should give into the illicit demands of spirits, has not stopped illicit practices from occurring in spirit possession. This is supported by the fact that many of the members of the

Ulama view many of the spirit possession practitioners (who are generally also possessed by spirits themselves) and the practices of blood drinking and magic to soothe or expel the spirit, as *shirk*, an action against Allah's will.¹⁴⁵ The statement by Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid, an Imam at 'Umar ibn Abd al-'Aziz mosque in al-Khobar, Saudi Arabia clearly reflects this,

Sihr (witchcraft or magic) is a word referring to something hidden. It is real and there are kinds of witchcraft that may affect people psychologically and physically, so that they become sick and die, or husbands and wives are separated. Its effects happen by the will of Allaah. It is a devilish action, most of which is only achieved by means of shirk and drawing close to the jinn and shayaateen (devils) by means of that which they love, and it is based on associating others with Allaah (shirk).

There are doctors who are also practitioners of witchcraft, who treat people by means of seeking the help of the jinn. They claim to have knowledge of the sickness with no need to identify it, and they prescribe for the patient foods and drinks that bring him closer to his allies among the devils. He may tell them to slaughter a pig whilst saying “Bismillaah” over it, or to slaughter a permissible animal without saying “Bismillaah”, or when saying the name of one of the devils.¹⁴⁶

This dynamic, as seen in the quote above and throughout this chapter, did not occur overnight, since historical sources explain that soothing practices occurred within the region even before Islam. Historical sources explain the development of magical healing practices, and both history and anthropology have described Islamic practices of spirit conversion, exorcism, and isolation before the early 1940's. With this information and these sources in mind, it is possible the development of modern day spirit possession practices, such as soothing, conversion, magical healing, exorcism, and isolation, are shaped by, and inseparable from, the orthodox beliefs and practices of Islam. Did the authorities' interaction with one another actually lead to the development of variation Islamic spirit possession practices?

The simple answer is yes, the parallel development of the Islamic spirit possession authorities did affect spirit possession practices. This is further supported by the fact the spirit possession practitioners and *Ulama*'s choices of practices to combat possession and the misbehavior of the possessed host, which suggests that the development of spirit possession authorities and practices were co-dependent. Only through further exploration into these competing authorities, does it become evident that these *Ulama* and spirit possession authorities' choices on treatment is a direct reflection of these authorities tandem

¹⁴⁵ Islam QA: Ruling on Witchcraft, The Evil Eye and Destructive Envy: Accessed on Aug 2011

¹⁴⁶ Islam QA: Ruling on Witchcraft, The Evil Eye and Destructive Envy: Accessed on Aug 2011

development and the changes to their interpretation of spirit possession over time. Additionally, through the examination of these competing authorities we can then begin to truly understand why the variety of spirit possession practices exist in a society that is based on the same codified textual tradition. This is what we will be exploring in the next chapter.

III. THE RISE OF DUELING AUTHORITIES WITHIN ISLAMIC SPIRIT POSSESSION

As seen in Chapter 2, the authorities associated with spirit possession practices, the *Ulama* and the spirit possession practitioners, have chosen a variety of ways to deal with the problem of spirit possession. These authorities tend to draw their authority from two major sources, the textual tradition, and historical understanding and interactions with *jinn*. This difference in their sources of authority trace back to the beginnings of Islam, such as spirit possession authorities tracing their authority back to ancient Egyptians and orthodox Islamic authorities tracing their authority back to Prophet Muhammad. Through further exploration into the competing authorities, it is evident that the *Ulama* and spirit possession authorities' roles became increasingly gender oriented as their interpretation of spirit possession changed in tandem with the changes in how Islam was practiced throughout its history. Over time, the *Ulama* authorities became mainly male dominated, drawing their authority from their understanding of the Islamic textual tradition, while the spirit possession practitioners became mainly female dominated, drawing their authority from their understanding and experiences with dealing with *jinn* occurrences over centuries.

Although these authorities seem gendered in practice, there is nothing explicitly forbidding women from becoming religious authorities, or men from taking a leading role in spirit possession. This can be seen though a more recent development within the orthodox Islamic authorities where women are now joining the men as Imams, and "Morocco became the first country in the Arab world to officially sanction the training of female religious leaders" in 2006.¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, in 2009, Brigid Maher's two documentaries titled *Veiled Voices* and *Ladies of Brilliance* show that women are becoming part of the *Ulama*, and these women are choosing to move into the Islamic periphery in order to teach Islamic consciousness and correct Islamic values.¹⁴⁸ So with this in mind, how can competing authorities develop

¹⁴⁷ Lim, L. NPR: Accessed on Aug 2011

¹⁴⁸ Maher, B. *Veiled Voices*: Accessed on Aug 2011

in tandem, yet with competing gender-oriented roles when the same textual tradition allegedly serves as the foundation for every Muslim society?

Through the examination of historical and anthropological sources, the development of tandem Islamic authorities seems to be a phenomenon of causality, or causation. The ever-changing development of Islam and major influences in the Arabian Peninsula shaped Islamic spirit possession practitioners and *Ulama* into what we can observe today. A *causal nexus* (bond between cause and effect) could connect these two authorities, since the two authorities were likely both the cause and effect for the others' emergence, for changes in their practices, or for modification in their authority roles within society and their spirit possession beliefs.¹⁴⁹ Recognizing the impact of these influences on the development of both of these authorities, this chapter will examine the effects of these influences, including textual traditions, pre-Islamic Bedouin Tribes, Sassanian and Byzantine Empires, magical healing practices, and early Islamic influences, on both authorities' development, roles within society, and practices. Furthermore, this bifurcation of Islamic spirit possession practitioners and *Ulama* has not stopped, and the recent acceptance of women Imams, which suggesting that there are no explicit statements in the *Qur'an* forbidding or denying their roles as authority figures, could further influence their development, practices, and roles within society.

THE ADVENT OF ISLAM SPIRIT POSSESSION AUTHORITIES THROUGH ITS INFLUENCES

To understand how it was possible for multiple spheres of authority to have emerged within Islam and Islamic spirit possession, an examination of the influences on its development is necessary. It has been suggested by I. M. Lewis that the study of spirit possession needs to include an understanding of how

¹⁴⁹Blackburn, S. "Causation." The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy: Accessed on Dec 2011; Blackburn, S. "Causal Nexus." The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy: Accessed on Aug 2011
Causal nexus is a philosophy concept that states there is a bonding or link between a cause and its effect, as a chain of circumstances or events. This concept was famously argued by Hume, "Events, Hume thought, are in themselves 'loose and separate'; how then are we to conceive of the power that one has to constrain others? The relationship seems not to be perceptible, for all that perception gives us (Hume argued) is knowledge of the patterns that events do actually fall into, rather than any acquaintance with the connections determining the patterns. It is clear that our conception of everyday objects is largely determined by their causal powers, and all our action is based on the belief that these causal powers are stable and reliable." Furthermore, Hume also argued "we can see that events do follow one upon another, but we cannot see that they must do so, or frame any notion of the necessary connection."

social factors and environment affect the society and its members' interpretation of their worldview.¹⁵⁰

This idea to include social factors and environmental effects in the study of spirit possession is important to this study because these influences can be a compelling force within a society and can affect the development of ritual actions, social hierarchy, behavior, and worldview. As we explore the possible influences that gave rise to Islamic forms of spirit possession in this chapter, we will gain a new insight into the development of these two gender-oriented authority roles.

Spirit possession practitioners and their practices have one of the oldest recorded references within Islam, since many Muslims tie their beliefs of soothing back to David and Solomon. This can be seen further through Emily Smith-Savage's studies on Islamic spirit possession where she has argued that the pre-Islamic period influenced the development of Islamic spirit possession beliefs. She states, "Solomon was said to be the first to subjugate the jinn to his will. Licit magic, the 'praiseworthy method' (*at-tarika al-mahmuda*) in Islam is usually traced back to Solomon, and illicit magic (*at-tarikta al-madhmuna*) to Iblis through his daughter or his son's daughter, Baydakh."¹⁵¹ In addition, the Bedouin tribes had *Kahins* (*Kahina*: feminine form) who served as the tribes' cultic officials or soothsayers through possession or going in to a trance to reveal divine messages. It is possible that soothsayers and practitioners in modern Islamic societies trace their lineage back to the Bedouin tribes. With the rise of Islam, the practice of soothing did not disappear within many of these Muslim societies, but rather went underground. Furthermore, the influences that led to the development of women primarily taking modern day authority roles as spirit possession practitioners seems to have begun even before formation of Islam within the region.

Throughout the past 13 centuries, these two authorities have developed in tandem because the probable actions of one authority affected the other. As this examination continues to explore historical and anthropological sources, this *causal nexus* between the Islamic spirit possession practitioners and *Ulama* becomes more apparent and begins to shed light into these authorities' development, changes in practices, or modifications in their authority roles within society. Only through the recognition of these

¹⁵⁰ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 18-22; Lambek, M. 1990: 440

¹⁵¹ Smith-Savage, E. 2004: 92

influences and their impact on the development of both of these authorities, can one notice that this tandem development has not stopped, and the recent acceptance of women Imams could further change these authorities' development, practices, and roles within society.

KAHINS AND PROPHET MUHAMMAD: INFLUENCES THAT SHAPED MODERN SPIRIT POSSESSION PRACTICES

We can see the first noticeable influences on the development of Islamic Spirit possession practices through the changing Islamic interpretations of early authority roles within Islamic society. This change in Islamic authority occurred over time; eventually it led to the historic Bedouin leaders' roles changing into today's *Ulama*. However, these changes to the Islamic authority roles also affected the development of modern spirit possession practices. Considering this change in authority roles, it is necessary to examine some of the major influences to authority and its role within early Islamic society, such as the Bedouin tribal structure and the role the Prophet Muhammad had in the establishment of Islam. Furthermore, this examination of early Islamic authority roles will in turn lend itself to the larger discussion at hand, the understanding of the influence that affected the development of modern spirit possession practices. Especially, when one of the dominant authority figures in the Bedouin Tribes were the *Kahins*, who are cultic officials or soothsayers, it is possible that the *Kahins* and the Prophet Muhammad's actions in the establishment of Islam had significant effects on the development and transformation of the two authorities associated with modern-day spirit possession practices.

Bedouin Influences

The pre-Islamic Bedouins tribes and their practices mainly derive from the Bedouin tribal structure and authority roles, and most importantly the roles of the Bedouin *Kahin*. This tribal structure consisted of a *Qa'id*, one who acted as a war leader; a *Kahin*, one who is a cultic official or soothsayer; a *Hakam*, one who settles disputes, and a *Shaykh*, "one who bears the marks of old age," and is the most highly respected member of the community. The *Kahins* played an important role within Bedouin society, and not only may clarify the reason why spirit possession practices were common among early Muslims

but also why latter-day Muslims associate such practices with women.¹⁵² The pagan societies in pre-Islamic Arabia really did not have a priesthood in the modern sense of what a priest is, nor pagan scriptures. Instead, they had the *Kahin*, who were poets that “functioned primarily as soothsayers.”¹⁵³ As poets, they also were bards, tribal historians, social commentators, interpreters of dreams, guardians of the sanctuary, makers of sacrifices, dispensers of moral philosophy, expounders upon ethics, clearer up crimes, settlers of disputes, and administrators of justice. Anyone from any economic or social status, even women, could become a *kahin* or a *kahina*. During the pre-Islamic period, the *kahin* was “considered the link between humanity and the divine, the *kahins* did not communicate directly with the gods but rather accessed them through the *jinn* and other spirits,” and, “for a fee, would fall into a trance in which they would reveal divine messages through rhyming couplets.”¹⁵⁴ These *kahins* also played an important authority role within the Bedouin tribe, and Reza Aslan states,

Because the Arabs were wary of concentrating all the functions of leadership in a single individual, the Shaykh had little real executive authority. Every important decision was made through collective consultation with other individuals in the tribe who had equally important roles:” the Qa'id, the Kahin, and the Hakam.¹⁵⁵

The *kahins* were probably respected authority figures within the tribe, and through their roles as soothsayers giving insight into the world around them, forecasting the future, selecting of the Bedouin tribe's *Shaykh*, and his/her many other roles, the *kahins* had a marked effect in shaping the Bedouin tribes' worldview and practices.¹⁵⁶

As Islam emerged within the Arabian Peninsula and its societies, it began to incorporate pre-Islamic practices and Islamized them. One such pre-Islamic practice that Islam incorporated was tribal order through *Lex talionis*, the Law of Retribution. Tribal law centered on a code of honor called *muruwah* or *muruwwa*, manliness, which encompassed ideas of hospitality and generosity, strength and bravery, good judgment, honor, and loyalty to one's kin. This code led to a kind of legal structure in which

¹⁵² Bosworth, C.E. The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition, Vol IV, Fascicules 67-68, 1985: 421

¹⁵³ Aslan, R. 2005: 7; "kâhin." *Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica Online*, 2011. Accessed 30 May. 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Aslan, R. 2005: 7-8

¹⁵⁵ Aslan, R. 2005: 29; Bosworth, C.E. The Encyclopaedia of Islam: New Edition, Vol IV, Fascicules 67-68, 1985: 420

¹⁵⁶ Aslan, R. 2005: 29

vengeance was very important, since hurting a member of the tribe was equivalent to hurting the whole tribe. Vengeance was the responsibility of the whole tribe, and it was necessary to maintain the tribe's honor during a time where a legal system like this caused constant warfare. These traits were important for the protection of the family and tribe; however, these traits became very important to Islam and its practices. The best example one can find in the *Qur'an* is the concept of an eye for an eye, or *Lex talionis*. The *Qur'an* 5:45 states,

We ordained therein for them: "Life for life, eye for eye, nose for nose, ear for ear, tooth for tooth, and wounds equal for equal." But if any one remits the retaliation by way of charity, it is an act of atonement for himself. And if any fail to judge by (the light of) what Allah hath revealed, they are (No better than) wrong-doers.¹⁵⁷

As seen in the *Qur'an* and through the historical sources, many societies throughout the region, and even early Muslims practiced *Lex talionis*, or the law of retaliation. This also supports the idea that principals of *muruwwa* influenced the development of early Islamic authority and world.

Another pre-Islamic practice that Islam incorporated was the "Practice of Ghazw." This practice is important not just in the way wealth was distributed within a Muslim society, but the way the Prophet Muhammad established Islamic state. *Ghazw*, *ghazwa*, or *ghazah* refers to the act of raiding outside communities as an important means of acquiring or redistributing resources. The Muslims called people who practiced *ghazw* "ghawi," and they engaged in raiding such that no member of either side was killed—hence, preventing blood feud. In Raphael Patai's book *The Arab Mind*, he states,

A successful ghazw achieved two aims at once: it strengthened one's own group by augmenting the numbers of its herds and flocks, and it weakened the enemy by reducing its herd and flocks, which are the basis of livelihood, even survival, in the desert.¹⁵⁸

The members of the tribe split the wealth from the raid, and the *Shaykh* received one-fifth of any spoils. However, there were some rules associated with the ways they performed *ghazw*. The raiding occurred only during certain periods of the day, and there were "rules of engagement" that were always honored.

The Encyclopedia of Islam: New Edition, Vol. II states,

The attack itself, provided the raiders were genealogically and socially close to the section to be raided, was made at sunrise (sabah) or sunset, or at such times in between as the herd were not scattered. A night-attack (bayat), though it would succeed most easily,

¹⁵⁷ Quran: 5:45

¹⁵⁸ Patai, R. 2005: 86

was considered dishonorable.¹⁵⁹

To make it easier to follow these rules, the *Shaykh* led small parties to carry out these raids, and sent out scouts to protect the raiders and to prevent bloodshed.¹⁶⁰ In addition, these raids only occurred when the tribe's resources were depleted to a level in which they could not survive; this was always in relation "to the condition of the herds" and level, in which, they had been raided. Patai quotes Hitti by stating, "According to the rules of the game – and *ghazw* is a sort of national sport – no blood should be shed except in cases of extreme necessity... These ideas of *ghazw* and its terminology were carried over by the Arabians into the Islamic conquests."¹⁶¹

When Islam formed, it institutionalized the practice of *ghazw* and "Islamized" it. Berkey states "the Arab conquests began as an extension and redirection of the older practice of *ghazw*: having united the Arabs of the peninsula for the first time in a single state, the leaders of the community sought an outlet for this tribal imperative, and conveniently found one in the rich but weakened societies of Syria and Iraq."¹⁶² The *Qur'an* further supports the idea that the Muslims "Islamized" the practice of *ghazw*, and *surah* 8:41 shows this,

And know that out of all the booty that ye may acquire (in war), a fifth share is assigned to Allah, -- and to the Messenger, and to near relatives, orphans, the needy, and the wayfarer, -- if ye do believe in Allah and in the revelation We sent down to Our servant on the Day of Testing, -- the Day of the meeting of the two forces. For Allah hath power over all things.¹⁶³

As seen in the *Qur'an* and through other historical sources, the practice of *ghazw* eventually became associated with battle and the way the spoils were; the Day of Testing refers to the Battle of Badr.¹⁶⁴ When Islam began to establish its authority, the Prophet Muhammad personally participated in many the battles.¹⁶⁵ According to As'ad AbuKhalil, "the Prophet Muhammad did not deprive his troops of the

¹⁵⁹ Johnstone, T.M. Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World Vol. II: 1055

¹⁶⁰ Johnstone, T.M., Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World Vol. II: 1055

¹⁶¹ Patai, R. 2005: 86

¹⁶² Berkey, J. 2003: 72

¹⁶³ Compendium of Muslim Text, University of Southern California, Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement, accessed on 26 Apr 2011,

<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/search.html>.

¹⁶⁴ Muhammad Ali, M., 2002: 385-386

¹⁶⁵ Youssef H. Aboul-Enein Sherifa Zuhur 2004: 6

spoils, as they were to receive four-fifths of the entire booty, with the remainder belonging to God.”¹⁶⁶ He suggests that the practice of *ghazw* continued throughout the emergence of Islam and the reigns of four rightfully guided Caliphs: Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali. Due to limitations of sources from this period, it is hard to understand the purpose of the raids; however, it is possible the raids continued into the neighboring countries as a way to solidify the Islamic religion’s authority and to gain more wealth. One thing that we can state about the later practice of *ghazw* within the Islamic context is that the Muslims stopped performing *ghazw* due to religious authoritative disputes. Abu Khalil states, “there was no consensus among scholars of jurisprudence on the exact interpretation of cited Qur’anic verse [Qur’an 8:41]. They could not agree on whether the Imam should receive the one-fifth of the spoils that belonged to God.” The practices of *ghazw* and *Lex talionis* were two pre-Islamic practices that Islam adopted; however, Islam did not “Islamize” many practices. Some of the non-Islamized practices belonged to the *kahins*.

The Prophet Muhammad’s Influence on the Ulama’s View of Spirit Possession

It is possible the reason early Islamic society did not incorporate the practices and the authority role of the *Kahins* comes from the *Ulama*’s view on spirit possession, which itself comes directly from the Prophet Muhammad’s opinion of the *kahin* and their role within society. The *Ulama* draw their right to lead the Islamic community from the textual tradition and the Prophet Muhammad’s actions, and this includes their understanding of spirit possession. Islam began to emerge in 610 C.E. in the Arabian Peninsula when the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation on Mount Hira. Tradition states that the Prophet Muhammad only confided in his wife, Khadija, his cousin, Ali ibn Tablib, and perhaps one or two other close acquaintances. It is likely that the Prophet Muhammad did not want people to consider him as a *Kahin*.¹⁶⁷ Reza Aslan further conveys the idea that Prophet Muhammad did not want people to consider him a *Kahin*, where he states,

¹⁶⁶ As’ad Abu Khalil, Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World Vol. II, 1995: 66

¹⁶⁷ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 14

Islam began to emerge in 610 C.E. in the Arabian Peninsula when the Prophet Muhammad received his first revelation on Mount Hira, outside of Mecca, from the Archangel Gabriel during the eighteenth night of Ramadan. Tradition states that the first visit happened when Muhammad was asleep in a cave where he was meditating.

As far as Muhammad understood, only the Kahin, whom he despised as reprehensible charlatans (“I could not even look at them,” he once exclaimed), received messages from the heavens. If his experience at Mt. Hira meant that he was himself becoming a Kahin, and that his colleagues in Mecca were now going to regard him as such, then he would rather be dead,

‘Never shall Quraysh say this of me!’ Muhammad swore. ‘I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest’

Muhammad was right to worry about being compared to a Kahin. What is impossible to discern in any translation of those first few verses of the revelation is their exquisite poetic quality. That initial recitation, and those that immediately followed, were delivered in rhyming couplets, which were very much like the ecstatic utterances of the Kahin.¹⁶⁸

The Prophet Muhammad’s despising of *kahin*, as seen in the quote above, could be one of the reasons why his actions were toward the formal establishment of Islamic political and religious authorities that did not resemble the ones found in the Bedouin Tribes. Furthermore, *Sahih Muslim’s Hadith* states, “Aba Mas’ud al-Ansari (Allah be pleased with him) reported that Allah’s Messenger (may peace be upon him) forbade the charging of the price of the dog, and earnings of a prostitute and sweets offered to a kahin.” The *Hadith* offers a story about the fact men have to be suspicious of the words of a *Kahin*, since they do not resemble those of Allah.¹⁶⁹ So, what did the Prophet Muhammad do to separate himself from *kahins* and their practices?

The revelations from Allah led the Prophet Muhammad to begin openly preaching to a society engaging in idol-worship, alcoholism, prostitution and anything for self-satisfaction. The Prophet Muhammad stated he was the bearer of Allah’s (God’s) universally valid message emanating from an actual, living and exclusive deity. In addition, he started to win converts by showing that he was not like the *kahins*, and he started slowly to break away from the Bedouin tribe’s construct of authority. This breaking away from the established Bedouin authority eventually caused issues for the early Muslims as they started to be persecuted, and the Prophet Muhammad’s opposition tried to buy him out and to

¹⁶⁸ Aslan, R., 2005: 37

It is very important to note that Reza Aslan is a Muslim and he is writing about the religion that he practices. This makes his works a good source for a Muslim’s insight into Islamic religion. However, he is also a historian, but his work is plagued with poor citations. This makes it hard to discern fact from personal interpretations, and this can be seen in the quote that used. For example he states, “‘Never shall Quraysh say this of me!’ Muhammad swore. ‘I will go to the top of the mountain and throw myself down that I may kill myself and gain rest,’” and this probably originates from one of the many hadith of the Prophet Muhammad collections. However, without proper in-text citations, this statement is not easy to verify, due to the fact the author has limited access to complete and entire hadith collections.

¹⁶⁹ Sahih Muslim Hadith, Book 10 Number 3803 and Book 031, Number 6046

assassinate him. However, the Prophet Muhammad's powerful family saved him.¹⁷⁰

As Islam continued its development, the Prophet Muhammad continued to receive more revelations from Allah; these revelations would eventually lead to the development of appropriate Islamic ritual actions. In 620 C.E., the development Islamic ritual actions began as the Prophet Muhammad made the "night journey" to Jerusalem on the back of the flying horse called Busraq.¹⁷¹ Tradition states the horse stopped at the Temple Mount where the archangel Gabriel took Muhammad to see the divine Presence. This journey was recorded in the *Qur'an*, which it states, "Glory to (Allah) Who did take His servant for a Journey by night from the Sacred Mosque to the farthest Mosque, whose precincts We did bless, in order that We might show him some of Our Signs: for He is the One Who heareth and seeth (all things)."¹⁷² This "night journey" and the Prophet Muhammad's conversation with the divine Presence led to development of praying five times a day, which in turn became the first important towards the establishment to Islamic ritual actions and further separated the Prophet Muhammad from the *Kahins*. Nevertheless, the Prophet Muhammad's further separation from the Bedouin Tribal authority cause added persecution on early Muslims, which led the Prophet Muhammad to take new measures to protect them.

In 622, C.E., in search of establishing a peaceful place to practice Islam, the Prophet Muhammad and early Muslims moved to Yathrib, now known as Medina. The Prophet Muhammad first tried to leave Mecca in September without anyone noticing, but the Meccan authorities found out and tried to kill him. However, on July 16, 622 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad made it to Yathrib, finally allowing Muslims to practice their new religion freely.¹⁷³ The tradition states that while the Prophet was traveling to Medina, he untethered his camel, and the place where the Camel stopped to graze became the site of the first Mosque. At this time, the Muslims renamed Yathrib as Medina al-Rasul, the city of the Prophet, and the Prophet Muhammad instituted the communal prayer meeting on Friday afternoons- where all men in Medina were

¹⁷⁰ Rahman, H. U., 1997: 15

¹⁷¹ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 17

Between 615-616 C.E., the early Muslims began to be persecuted by the pagans and probably by some of the members of his own tribe in Mecca. Muhammad's opposition tried to buy him out and to assassinate him, but his powerful family saved him.

¹⁷² Qur'an 17:1

¹⁷³ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 18

invited to the meeting, including the Jewish population. It is reasonable to assume that these Friday meetings became instrumental to the development of the Prophet's authority in the town and later in the region. This probably was the place where he gained the political and military support needed to ensure the survival of Islamic religion and its followers. As a whole, the date July 16, 622 C.E. becomes very important to Muslims because the Prophet Muhammad finally establishes Islam, as noted by the fact this date is the beginning of the Islamic Calendar, *Hijra*, and Muslims considered it the beginning of "true" Islam.¹⁷⁴

In addition, between 623-624 C.E., as the Prophet's authority grew, the Prophet Muhammad issued the Constitution on Medina, a legal document designed to promote harmony among the Arabs and the Jews in Medina. This document becomes very important to Islamic diplomacy because this action was the first exercise of what would later develop into Islamic Jurisprudence. Additionally, through the Prophet Muhammad's actions associated with Constitution on Medina, the Prophet Muhammad, as a single individual had performed the roles of the *Hakam* and *Shaykh*. This event was also the turning point where the Prophet Muhammad showed that he was not just some soothsayer spouting visions, but he was a man who started to develop a new political and cultural identity. However, there were some major threats to him within the Arabian Peninsula that could disrupt the Muslims' development of their political and cultural identity that he needed to deal with.

Since the time when the Prophet Muhammad left Mecca, the Meccan authorities had been after him and his followers. In 624 C.E., the Meccans started four long series of attacks on Medina. It is reasonable to assume that the Prophet Muhammad understood he needed to stop these attacks from occurring through a variety of different means to ensure not only his survival, but also the survival of Islam. One such battle was the Battle of Badr, where the Prophet Muhammad and 300 Muslims intersected a caravan, with considerable wealth and merchandise intended to help the Meccans fight the Muslims. During the Battle of Badr, the Prophet Muhammad and his small army met, fought, and defeated his uncle

¹⁷⁴ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 18 & 19

and 950 Meccan troops.¹⁷⁵ This battle was a significant step forward in the formation of the Islamic state, because it was the first time the Muslim community displayed the strength and conviction as ‘believers’ in Islam. As the Meccans continued to attack the Muslims, the Meccans were defeated every time.¹⁷⁶ A major turning point had occurred; the Prophet Muhammad had also become a leader who led his followers in battle, such as the Bedouin *Qa'id*. Now, the Prophet Muhammad, himself, was performing three of the four authority roles normally split within the Bedouin Tribes, and with the Prophet Muhammad’s actions, he began to redefine the concept of authority within the Arab region.

Nonetheless, the Prophet Muhammad probably still realized the Bedouins Tribes possessed a threat to Muslims, and his actions in 628 C.E. reflect that the threat still existed. In 628 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad decided to lead a group of Muslims to Mecca for the annual *Hajj* to the Ka’aba.¹⁷⁷ In the 7th century, the Arab region possessed a very important pagan religious enclave, known as the Ka’aba, which is still located in the city of Mecca.¹⁷⁸ Within the area of the Ka’aba, there is a long lasting rule in which people worshiping there are safe. It was open to everyone, and it was free of religious persecution. However, the Meccan tribes prevented the Prophet Muhammad and Muslims from attending pilgrimage, which violated the principles of the Ka’aba. Eventually, the Prophet Muhammad was able to get the Meccans to negotiate with him, and they drew up the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah allowing Muslims to make the pilgrimage the following year. Then in 630 C.E., the Meccans violated the treaty, and at this point, the Prophet Muhammad assembled an army of 10,000 men and marched to Mecca. The Meccan leadership realized that they were no match for the army, and surrendered. They surrendered to the Prophet’s followers living in Mecca, and to those sympathetic to Islam.

When Muhammad was inside the Ka’aba, he destroyed the 360 pagan idols that the Meccan tribes had placed around the Ka’aba.¹⁷⁹ Then the Prophet Muhammad sent twenty armed horsemen to destroy the statue of the popular Meccan goddess, Manat. Manat was one of three sisters, daughters to the patron

¹⁷⁵ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 19 & 20

¹⁷⁶ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 19 - 22

¹⁷⁷ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 18.

¹⁷⁸ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 23-24

¹⁷⁹ Rahman, H. U. 1997: 24-25

deities that the Meccan tribes worshipped. Prophet Muhammad then wrote the following in the *Qur'an*:

Have you thought on al-Lat and al-Uzza
And on Manat, the third other?
Are you to have the sons, and HE the daughters?
This is indeed an unfair distinction!
They are but names which you and your fathers have invented;
Allah has vested no authority in them;
The unbelievers follow but vain conjectures and the whims of their souls, although the
guidance of Allah has long since come to them.¹⁸⁰

According to Muslim belief, this verse from the *Qur'an* shows that Satan inspired any figure worshipped other than Allah. Muhammad also felt that the pagan gods of the Meccan tribes were impure in the sense that they encouraged their followers to pursue the wrong path toward enlightenment. After the Prophet Muhammad took over the city of Mecca and destroyed the statue of Manat and her sisters al-Lat and al-Uzza, Islam was given a religious backbone and a spiritual home.

In 632 C.E., the Prophet Muhammad died from an illness. Within the time that the Prophet was alive, he was able to establish the political authority of Islam, his authority as a prophet, the foundation of Muslim cultural identity, and their worldview. The majority of the Prophet Muhammad's actions were to combat *jāhiliyyah*, "the age of ignorance," and the pagan beliefs, such as the role of *kahins* within society, because these beliefs were leading the people astray. The actions and revelations of the Prophet are the foundation of the *Ulama*, and the prophet's feeling toward the *kahin* have affected the orthodox Islamic authorities' view of spirit possession practices, as seen with their comments that spirit possession makes the possessed host a disbeliever through *shirk* actions.

The Effects of Prophet Muhammad and Kahin on the Spirit Possession

Considering the Prophet Muhammad despised the *Kahin* and did everything in his power to prevent people from thinking of him as a *Kahin*, the Prophet Muhammad's actions started a long-term process of shaping spirit possession practices and its authorities into what we can observe in the modern-day. Because spirit possession cannot just disappear in a society that clearly defines that spirit possession can occur, the practices and the authority of the *Kahins* begin to change within Muslim society, and the Prophet Muhammad directly influenced this. The Prophet Muhammad defined a new set of rules that he

¹⁸⁰ Qur'an 53:7-11

requested society follow, which, in turn, took away the *Kahins*' authority. However, it is reasonable to assume that the *Kahins*' knowledge of *jinn* allowed them to take on another role within society, and this role, over centuries, becomes the role of spirit possession practitioner. Just like the development of Islam itself, the role of modern-day spirit possession practitioner changes with new interpretations of the world around them and new influences on society affect it. Additionally, at the time of Prophet Muhammad's death it is also reasonable to assume that the *Kahins* had not clearly defined the path that they were going to take, probably because Islam was still on a path to clear define itself. One thing is clear in the 632 C.E., this unknown future of both authorities and their actions in the process of defining themselves probably indirectly affected the other. Only through further exploration of these two authorities, can one begin to truly understand what led to the development of two major Islamic categories of authorities within spirit possession practices.

THE INFLUENCES OF “THE LEARNED”

When the Prophet Muhammad died, Islam was still in a process of transformation. The Prophet Muhammad was able to break himself away from the Bedouin construct of *Kahin*, and he was able to show a single individual was able to possess many different types of authority. However, the Prophet Muhammad's actions and revelations started the phenomenon of “the learned” gaining religious authority within Islam. Over time, as history explains, the *Ulama*, “the learned” become the dominate authority in Islam. It is also important to note that Islam is not the only modern day religion that relies on the religiously educated to rightly guide its follower, and it is possible Muslims realized very early that they needed to invest religious authority into religiously educated through the influences and development of “the learned” in other religions around them. One such possible influence of the Islamic development of “the learned” authority structure could be the sorting and development of authoritative roles from the Jewish community housed within the Sassanian Empire. Additionally, it is possible that the historical rise of “the learned” rabbis and their influence on the nature of Islamic authority also influenced its opposite: the emergence the dominant authority within the residual categories of Islamic soother and spirit possession practitioner leadership.

Jewish Sassanian Influences the Ulama Tradition

“The learned,” that is, the rabbis, rose to power within the Jewish Sassanian population over other historical authorities who may have been part of a hereditary priesthood, spiritually chosen or who had powers vested in them by a higher power. Ideally, in most of the world’s modern major religions, well-educated men and women should hold leadership positions and through their knowledge make decisions for the greater good of society, because they gained their authority through their study of their textual tradition or through their wisdom and knowledge of the world around them. However, the well educated did not always hold authority in their historical societies. Considering this, it is possible that the rise of Rabbinical Judaism in the Sassanian Empire spearheaded a revolution in neighboring religions, eventually including Islam, because the rabbis drew their authority from the Jewish religious textual tradition.

The Sassanian Empire was home to many religions because, during the Achaemenid period, Cyrus the Great had laid the foundation of Sassanian religious tolerance through the proclamation on his cylinder.¹⁸¹ Berkey states, “Iran’s geographical location was a critical factor in giving shape to the religion mix... Zoroastrian priest Karter listed Jews, Shamans, Christians, Manichaeans, and Brahmins” As citizens of the empire.¹⁸² By the 4th Century C.E., Zoroastrianism was the primary religion of the Sassanian Empire, and Zoroastrianism had strong ties to the Empire’s history and culture, and was closely connected to the Sassanian state. However, the Zoroastrian Sassanians allowed the Jews to practice freely among them. Berkey states, “under the Sassanian rulers, Jews were afforded a high degree of communal autonomy, an arrangement which in many ways foreshadowed the regime of self-contained communities, rooted in religious identity, which helped to shape the social structure of medieval Islamic cities.”¹⁸³ The Jewish population in the Sassanian Empire arrived between 587/586 B.C.E due to the Babylonian Exile. Even when the 70-year exile was over, many Jews decided to stay in the Sassanian Empire because the

¹⁸¹ Cyrus Cylinder, The British Museum: Highlights. Accessed on online on 12 May 2011

The Cyrus the Great Cylinder, otherwise known as Cyrus Cylinder, was discovered by archaeologist Hormuz Rassam in 1879 C.E. and, now, is housed in the British Museum. The cylinder is an important historical and it could be considered by many as the first declaration of human right in the world. Even though the cylinder mainly discusses Cyrus’ conquest of the Babylonian Empire around 539 B.C.E.,

¹⁸² Berkey, J. 2003: 26-27

¹⁸³ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

Jewish society was allowed to freely worship and take political roles within the Empire. Nevertheless, the Jewish population in Persia still searched for their political and cultural identity. Jonathan P. Berkey quotes Salo W. Baron's work titled *Social and Religious History of the Jews* and this quote demonstrates the significant growth of the Jewish population in Sassanian Empire,

Josephus described Syria as that region of the ancient world in which Jews constituted the largest proportion of the population. But by the fourth century, the cultural and probably the demographic center of Judaism lay to the east, in Mesopotamia. The Jewish community there was old, dating back to the Achaemenid Empire, but it grew substantially in late antiquity, in part because the Sassanian emperors encouraged Jewish immigration from the rival (and considerably more hostile) Roman Empire, and in part through a process of conversion among the native Aramaean population with whom the Jews shared a common vernacular.¹⁸⁴

As seen in the above quote, the growth of the Jewish community thrived, and historians have estimated that the Jewish population living in the region was approximately 2 million by 500 C.E.¹⁸⁵ The toleration that the Jews enjoyed in Persia was crucial to the development of the Jewish political and cultural identity throughout the world, since "it was largely in the rabbinical academies of Iraq that Jewish law took shape" and shaped the development of Jewish religious authority.¹⁸⁶

The Jewish Rabbis and their religious authority, associated with their possession of the oral law tracing back to Moses and the understanding of written law, began to form in the Sassanian Empire after the Bar Kochba Revolt, and it transformed into the only accepted Jewish authority by the end of the Sassanian period.¹⁸⁷ Before the Rabbis took the religious and political role as the voice of the whole Jewish community, they shared the role of leading the Sassanian Jewish community with the "Jewish vassal prince," or exilarch. Historical sources state that the exilarch claimed his family was descended from David's line, and he possessed the authority to administer justice, police the community, and levy taxes. In addition, the exilarch could raise troops for the Sassanian imperial army when necessary.¹⁸⁸ Throughout the fourth and fifth century, the Rabbis created an institution, associated with their understanding of Jewish law, for instruction and learning, and this institution led to the Rabbis'

¹⁸⁴ Berkey, J. 2003: 13 & 15

¹⁸⁵ Berkey, J. 2003: 13-14

¹⁸⁶ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

¹⁸⁷ Berkey, J. 2003: 14- 15

¹⁸⁸ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

interpretation of Jewish law becoming the dominant interpretation in Persia and in the diaspora.¹⁸⁹ The rabbis' authority took a political dimension when tensions grew between the rabbis and the exilarch, and led to the rabbis' authority surpassing the exilarch's authority as the representatives of the Jewish community.¹⁹⁰ Through this authority, the rabbis began to develop the meaning of what it meant to be Jewish. During this time, the rabbis were concerned about Jewish law and ritual purity due to their skepticism toward Jewish converts and the community's interactions with non-Jews and inter marriages, so they refined the idea of Jewish identity and created and "required the setting of sharper communal boundaries."¹⁹¹

The Influence of "The Learned" on the Islam

This rise of "the learned" was probably later experienced by many of the pre-Islamic Bedouin tribes, because many Arabian tribes lived in an area described by historians as the buffer states between the Sassanians and Byzantines, who also followed this idea that "the learned" holding religious authority within society.¹⁹² Both the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires employed these members of the Arab tribes or the whole tribe as officials in these buffer states. Hence, the Arabian tribes borrowed many aspects of the Byzantine and Sassanian civilizations, and their religious-political structure likely served as a model for the early Muslim community. This was a powerful influence for the development of cultural institutions Arabian Peninsula and much of what the Arabs learned about the civilized world through these buffer states because people from both the Byzantine and Sassanian Empires visited the buffer states. In addition, many of the Bedouin tribes converted to Judaism, as seen with the Prophet Muhammad's extended family and the majority of the pre-Islamic tribes living in Mecca and Yathrib. This influence of "the learned" Jews and development of male authority roles within Islam, could have led to the women *kahinas* losing their public prestige, but maintaining their authority roles within spirit possession cults due to their ability to handle spirits, a task which other authorities would have wished to avoid at all costs.

¹⁸⁹ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

¹⁹⁰ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

¹⁹¹ Berkey, J. 2003: 14

¹⁹² Lapidus, I. 2002: 14

Thus, with the development of the “learned” and their rise to authority, the spiritually chosen who had been given the vested religious authority in pre-Islamic society did not disappear entirely. In modern times, societies still invest religious authority in the rightly guided and spiritually chosen, but many societies have mixed this idea of rightly guided and “learned” into one. In many cases, the idea that individuals might resort to seeking the advice of the rightly guided and spiritually gifted has led to the development religious leaders possessing both qualities to ensure the success for their societal and religious beliefs. This is visibly the case with Islam, as seen with society choosing the rightly guided, the *Ulama*, to lead the community after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, but it is also appears to be the case with the development of spirit possession practitioners. Additionally, within modern day Islamic religion, the rightly guided and religious “learned” are given some of the highest religious positions.

The Influence of “The Learned” on Spirit Possession

The development of “the learned” within Islam probably influenced historical groups who drew their authorities from an oral tradition and an understanding of the supernatural, like the newly formed spirit possession descendants of *Kahins* who drew their authority directly from their interaction and understanding of the *jinn*. Paganism as a whole was “deeply rooted in local and ethnic communities” in the Arab region, and “pagan practice, values and expectation insinuated themselves in a variety of ways into the spiritual life and frame of reference of the new religious era.”¹⁹³ This ability to survive the development of “the learned” allowed the developing spirit possession descendants of *Kahin* to continue to shape spirit possession practices. Berkey presents a strong supporting case that the spirit possession descendants of *Kahin* took on another form of authority within their societies and they became a major authority to deal with afflictions, probably including spirit possession since Muslim society at the time and today believe that spirit possession is an illness. Berkey’s examination of *The Lausiac History of Palladius* shows that members of Egyptian society looked to the sorcerers, presumably pagan sorcerers, to find medical cures, and the best example come from the *The Lausiac History of Palladius* itself. “An Egyptian approached a (presumably pagan) sorcerer to enlist his aid in attracting a woman with whom he was

¹⁹³ Berkey, J. 2003: 35-36

infatuated, or barring that, prevailing upon her husband to throw her out. Through his magical charms, the sorcerer caused the woman to assume the shape of a horse.”¹⁹⁴ Even though *The Lausiaca History of Palladius* example is a Christian example, Egypt becomes a Muslim country in the 7th century, and it is reasonable to assume that Egyptians still went to the sorcerers for magical cures of their afflictions with Islam entering their land.

The spirit possession descendants of *Kahins*’ ability to survive the development of “the learned” even though their historical authority was stripped away from them led them to develop another form of authority as the magical healers. These magical healers still drew their authority directly from their interaction and understanding of the supernatural, such as *jinn*, and as seen through historical evidence, society still turned to the magical healers to deal with supernatural illnesses and the unknown. This development in tandem of the development of “the learned,” and over time, also led the spirit possession practitioners to modify their ideas of the authority roles from the spiritually chosen or rightly guided to the rightly guided spiritually knowledgeable. This transformation of the spirit possession descendants of *Kahins* to Muslim society’s magical healers becomes apparent in 14th century, where many Muslims wrote widely used magical healing texts to deal with supernatural illnesses, likely caused by the *jinn*. The development of these magical healing texts was likely highly influenced by the development of the Islamic textual tradition as a way to justify their soothing practices.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE TEXTUAL TRADITION

“The learned” within Islam did not just appear right after the Prophet Muhammad’s death; however, it took centuries for the modern day “learned”/*Ulama* structure to form. Moreover, one of the major reasons this *Ulama* structure arose within Islam came from the development of the Islamic tradition. Many religions in the region also went through a struggle to define their cultural and political identities through their development of a codified textual tradition. One such battle that could have affected the Islamic development of a textual tradition possibly results from the Sassanian Empire’s battle to define the Zoroastrian’s cultural and political identities among a society that was religiously diverse.

¹⁹⁴ Berkey, J. 2003: 35-36

Furthermore, the issue of defining the Islamic cultural and political identities is reflected in their own battle to develop a codified textual tradition.

Influences of a Textual Tradition on the Sassanian Empire

As stated earlier, the Sassanian Empire contained Zoroastrians, Jews, Shamans, Christians, Manichaeans, and Brahmans.¹⁹⁵ By the 4th Century C.E., Zoroastrianism had strong ties to the Empire's history and culture, and was closely connected to the Sassanian state. However, the Zoroastrian Sassanians were facing problems in formulating their cultural and political identity. Berkey states "part of the problem is textual: it is not easy to assign precise dates to the principal Zoroastrian text... A fundamental problem was that Zoroastrian doctrine took shape slowly, sometimes in response to the theological assertions of other religious traditions."¹⁹⁶ Over time, Zoroastrianism had three mutually antagonistic traditions develop. The first was a monotheistic- like tradition that believed there is a great god, Ahura Mazda, who controls a multitude of "deities as angelic beings." The second was a polytheistic tradition in the Sassanian period that believed "both Ahura Mazda and the personification of the evil principle, Angra Mainyu or Ahriman, to an impersonal god of infinite time and space, Zurvan. The third was a dualistic tradition that believed there was a cosmic battle between Ahura Mazda with his good deities and Angra Mainyu with his evil deities."¹⁹⁷

Therefore, during the formative period of Islam, one of the greatest challenges the Sassanian Empire faced was codifying a unified religious institution from the diverse Zoroastrian traditions that had emerged throughout the empire. Jews, Christians and Manicheans had something that Zoroastrians did not: a finite scripture. When this scriptural codification finally developed within the Sassanian Empire, the Zoroastrians and the state had laid a foundation for the conduct of all matters of life and worship. In addition, this religious textual tradition gave the established religious and political authorities a common source to define right from wrong, and identify appropriate forms of worship. This religious textual tradition then became the foundation for religious action and practices within the society that had accepted

¹⁹⁵ Berkey, J. 2003: 26-27

¹⁹⁶ Berkey, J. 2003: 27

¹⁹⁷ Berkey, J. 2003: 27-28

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Influences of a Textual Tradition on Islam

One of the lessons that early Muslims could have learned from the experiences of their Sassanian neighbors was this power of textually-based religious authority in defining and setting a common foundation for what is right and wrong. The process of shaping a finite scripture, as seen in Sassanian Empire, was probably the reason for the development of the Islamic codified textual tradition. In 650 C.E., the *Qur'an* existed in a variety of forms and collections of the Prophet Muhammad's revelations. It has been suggested by many historians that the strain on the unity of the Islamic community arose from resentment of Uthman ibn Affan's appointment, because the spoils of Islam's conquest were not being fairly distributed -- just going into the hands of Uthman's family. In addition, the various forms of religious text and collections of the Prophet Muhammad's revelations probably added to this strain, since the community did not have a common foundation.

This probably prompted Uthman to collect all of the forms and collections of the *Qur'an*, and have his personal scribe(s) compile an authorized version that he distributed in the community, and then burned all of the other forms and collections. Muslims believe this development of the *Qur'an*, as it is today, and "realizing that the original message from God might be inadvertently distorted by textual variants" is the greatest accomplishment of Uthman's reign as Caliph. According to tradition, Uthman lost the "Ring of the Prophet" in 650 C.E. Losing the ring beset Islam with ten years' worth of difficulties. Uthman was killed in 656 C.E. while reading the *Qur'an*. However, Uthman's major accomplishment was Muslims recognizing and accepting his version of the *Qur'an*, and his "revised" *Qur'an* becoming the final word of God and the foundation for all religious law and actions.

The development of the codified Islamic textual tradition became a benefit to the development of the *Ulama*, because the textual tradition became the main source for the *Ulama's* religious education. We can see the effect of the textual traditions on the *Ulama's* authority through the development of Islamic jurisprudence. Islamic jurisprudence is built on the four 'roots of law', which are the *Qur'an*, the *Sunna* of

the Prophet, the *Ijmā* and *Qiyās*.¹⁹⁸ These four foundations make up the *Shari'a*, which contains the rules by which a Muslim society is organized and governed, and it provides the means for resolving conflicts among individuals as well as between individuals and the state. The word *Shari'a* comes from the Arabic root *shara'a*, meaning “to set a path” and the *Qur'an* and the Islamic expressions of human intelligence, *ilm* and *fiqh* justify it. The latter two are procedures through which Muslims interpret the established law, enabling Muslims to cope with changing times and circumstances. The *Shari'a* provides *Ulama* with the tools to guide society's everyday life and allow them to explain the ideal behaviors and religious duties of a Muslim clearly.

Although Islam, shortly after the death of Uthman, split into two major denominations, Sunni and Shi'a, the denominations share this concept of the development of Islamic law. Moreover, the split between Sunni and Shi'a, associated with the legitimacy of the Islamic authority after death of Uthman, led to the continued development of the textual tradition through two major parallel traditions, as explained in Chapter 1. The later development of the *hadiths*, the *Books of Imams*, and the Sunni and Shi'a schools of thought, *madh'habs*, this reflect the revelations from Allah found in the *Qur'an* and the actions of the Prophet Muhammad, which in turn has now led to the variety of Islamic interpretation found in the *Ulama*. However, when the *Ulama*, whether Sunni or Shi'a, has a problem, especially spirit possession, the first place they look for an answer is the *Qur'an*. When the *Qur'an* discusses the problem at hand, the Sunni and Shi'a *Ulama* will have similar understanding on should be done to solve the problem, but their actions could be different due to the variety of their interpretations. This alone allows a variety of practices to occur within Islam but all are done to preserve the oneness of Allah. This seems to be case with *Ulama* understanding of spirit possession and role of magical healing with Islamic society. The *Ulama* examination of the textual tradition over the years has led to major changes in their practices after the 14th Century, especially in relation to role of magical healing and spirit possession.

Influences of the Textual Tradition on Spirit Possession & Magical Healing

¹⁹⁸ Rahman , F. 1979

By the 14th Century, a large body of magical healing literature existed that Muslims wrote, which further conveyed the historical impact of the spirit possession descendants of *Kahins* becoming the Muslim society's magical healers. It is possible that the development of magical healing literature occurred to solidify their legitimacy of their healing practices and their knowledge of the supernatural. Additionally, considering that modern day Muslims consider spirit possession to be an illness that cannot be cure by any other means, it is reasonable to consider this belief stems back to the period that magical healing was the only way to cure an illness. This concept that spirit possession is an illness gives the development of magical healing texts another dimension, that the magical healers played a very important role within Islamic society around the period the magical healing texts begin to appear in history. Furthermore, the eventual incorporation of Islamic aspects to historical magical healing practices, probably founded in magical healing understanding of the supernatural, added to complexity of the magical healers' transformation into what can be observed in modern day Islamic spirit possession practices.

It has been stated by many historians, especially Michael Dols, that "beliefs and practices played a large role in Muslim societies, but they have been largely ignored because of their intrinsic obscurity," and *Sihr*, magic or sorcery, seems to be one of these practices that Muslims themselves have largely ignored because of their intrinsic obscurity. Even though "the existence of sorcery and jinn, spirits, is a basic tenet of Islam and still plays an important role in Islamic life."¹⁹⁹ This practice of magic healing within Islam was not necessarily intended for evil purposes: it was meant to be a "more forceful method of supplication or a supercharged prayer" for therapeutic or healing purposes. By the Middle Ages, Islamic society and scholars had developed numerous manuals and practices, such as al-Bunns' (d. c. 622/1225) *Shams al-ma'arif al-kubra*, and Ibn an-Nadim's the *Fihrist*. The *Fihrist* "reveals both the abundance of magical texts that were available at the end of the tenth century and the context in which they were used,"

¹⁹⁹ Dols, M. W. 2004: 87 & 49

such as who used magic healing, like exorcists, jugglers, magicians, and what they did, like incantations [an-niranjiyat], tricks, and talismans.²⁰⁰ Dols sourced the Fihrist by stating,

The exorcists and magicians [al-mu'azzimun was-sahara] assert that the devils, jinn, and spirits [ash-shayatin wal-jinn wal-arwah] obey and serve them, being directed by their command and their prohibition. The exorcists, who pretend to observe the sacred Jaws, claim that this [power] is because of obedience to Allah, may His name be magnified.

Thus invocation is addressed to Him, and oaths by the spirits and devils are by His help, with the abandoning of lusts and by consequence of religious practices. Moreover, [they claim] that the jinn and the devils obey them, either because of obedience to Allah, may His name be magnified, or on account of [their making] oaths by Him, or else for fear of Him, blessed and exalted is He. For He has subjugated and humiliated them [the devils and jinn] by the potency of His holy names and because of mention of Him, uplifted and glorified is He.

The [other] magicians [as-sahara] assert that they enslave the devils by offerings and prohibitive acts. They [claim] that the devils are pleased by the committing of acts which are forbidden and which Allah, may His name be magnified, has prohibited. Thus the perpetrating of things such as abandoning prayer and fasting, permitting blood, marrying forbidden women, and other kinds of evil actions is also pleasing. This is common practice in Egypt and the nearby regions; the books which are written there are many and extant. The Babylon of the magicians is in the land of Egypt. A person who has seen this [state of affairs] has told me that there still remain men and women magicians and that all of the exorcists and magicians assert that they have seals, charms of paper, sandal, jazab, smoke, and other things used for their arts.²⁰¹

As seen in the quote above, the belief that possession by *jinn* or other spirits is considered to be an illness can be traced back to Ancient Egyptians since they had “developed a variety of techniques to protect against demonic possession,” and “possession in ancient Egypt seemed to involve transformation of both mind and body of possessed.”²⁰² This belief that possession is an illness leads Muslims to believe in magical healing as a way of curing illnesses caused by the supernatural. Dols later states that “the first group, including exorcists, claimed its legitimacy because they were the Instruments of God's power; they were good Muslims, observing the sacred law, and they performed their magic by invoking God or taking oaths in His name.” This first group probably included many of the spirit possession practitioners, since many historians and anthropologists have mentioned the practitioners’ use of the textual tradition and invoking God in practices, amulets, and talismans.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ Dols, M. W. 2004: 90

²⁰¹ Dols, M. W. 2004: 91

²⁰² McNamara, P. 2011: Vol 2: 106

²⁰³ Dols, M. W. 2004: 91

This use of the textual tradition and the 99 names of God probably gave the spirit possession practitioners a degree of legitimacy in many of their actions, even if the *Ulama* would likely consider some of their practices illegitimate. In addition, the development of magical texts within Islam, before the Middle Ages, shows the importance that some of these practitioners had on society's belief in on healing the ill and curing the conflicted. "Furthermore, while Muslim theologians tended to ignore the question of evil, magicians assumed its palpable existence, offered a plausible explanation for it, and used their expertise to combat it."²⁰⁴ These texts, in their own right, also validate the spirit possession practitioner's practices as examples of the practitioner's effectiveness in healing, since Muslims used many of these texts as guides to healing and they do not question the effectiveness of the magical healing practices. It is also highly likely that many of the practitioners discussed in these texts were probably people with previous knowledge of the spirits and the illnesses that the spirit caused, which further suggests that many of the pre-existing practitioners attempted to modify their practices to fit within the defined context of Islam. Furthermore, it is possible that *kahina* transformed into these magical healers over time occurred due to their spirit endowments and their pre-existing understanding of the spirits.

However, the *Ulama*'s interpretation of magical healing changed, probably through further examination of the textual tradition, especially in relation to the role of magical healing and spirit possession. The *Qur'an*, as seen earlier in Chapter 2, recognized the practice of sorcery and the *jinn*, and the development of magical practices and fore mentioned magical healing texts shows that magic was practiced. Over time the *Ulama*'s opinion on magical healing changed, because the *Qur'an* states that Islam is superior to magic. This statement of superiority is further reflected in many of the *hadiths*. Dols states,

Reportedly, a man from the Yemen named Dimad, who was a magician (*raqi*), came to Mecca, and he heard the people calling the Prophet a *majnun*. He went to Muhammad and offered to treat him, but the Prophet responded that he trusted entirely in God and that he was God's messenger. , As a result, Dimad was converted by the Prophet, and he professed that the Prophet's speech was finer than any soothsayer, magician, or poet. ('Uqala', Cairo edn., 11-12; Najaf edn., 8-9)²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Dols, M. W. 2004:

²⁰⁵ Dols, M. W. 2004: 90

This idea of Islam being superior to magic, as seen in the quote above, eventually led to the *Ulama* condemning the practice of magic and magical sciences as being too close to the forbidden practices of sorcery, since these magical healing practices did not rely on God and were considered to be conducted by godless practitioners.²⁰⁶ This condemning of magic healing, since it could be considered the work of devil, led to society defining sorcery as “enchantments, evil spells, and various types of conjuring that either produced injury to the body, mind, or spirit of their victim, so that the person became ill and died, or caused dissension between husband and wife.”²⁰⁷ The encroachment of magical healing on Islam and its religious authorities, as seen above, eventually led to the *Ulama* condemning magical healing for the godless spirit possession practitioners, which also affected the orthodox Islamic authorities’ view of spirit possession practices.

This change in the *Ulama*’s interpretation of magical healing led to the condoning of the illicit actions being used within any Islamic context or practice. Moreover, spirit possession’s evil nature was not something that Muslims could ignore. It is possible the *Ulama*’s idea that Muslims should avoid the spirits, the places where the spirit could reside, and development of appropriate prescribed treatments, prayer and *Qur’anic* cures, placation and negotiation, and abandoning the wild spirit and host, began to emerge among the *Ulama* as a way deal with the problem and threat that spirit possession posed on society. The development of these practices also probably occurred as a way to show and explain to Muslims what the proper Islamic practices to deal with spirit possession were. This is then a reflection of the fact magical healers, and their practices were considered effective in dealing with the supernatural and the illnesses caused by it.

Furthermore, modern day spirit possession practitioners still use many of the practices written about in 14th Century in magical healing texts because the text are reflections of magical healers understanding and knowledge of supernatural since the beginning of time. This suggests that even though the development of codified textual tradition over time changed the *Ulama*’s view on spirit possession and magical healing practices, spirit possession/magical healing practices still were probably going to continue

²⁰⁶ Dols, M. W. 2004: 94

²⁰⁷ Dols, M. W. 2004: 96

to occur within Muslim society, because the *Ulama* did not completely ban magical healing practices, they only banned the illicit action. Magical healing practices continued to evolve over the centuries into what we see today in modern spirit possession cults. Therefore, the Muslims wrote a large body of magical healing literature, which further conveys the historical Islamic approval of magical healing, and it is possible that the development of codified religious textual tradition also led to the development magical healing texts as a way to justify the soothing practices.

THE INFLUENCES OF HERESIES

The development of the codified textual tradition within Islam did not only change the *Ulama* view on spirit possession and magical healing practices, spirit possession practices, even associated with the illicit action, did not stop occurring in Muslim society. Within Islam, it is important to keep the *Ummah*, Islamic community, together even with the split between Sunni and Shi'a denominations and with the possible threat of heresies from spirit possession, since there is a possibility that possession could be considered by some as a way to talk to higher power. Likewise, many religions do not like heresies to occur within their society because the heresy and heretic causing it poses a threat to established authority, the society's social order and their worldview. Acknowledging the possibility of a heresy occurring within a society, Islam attempts to keep the *Ummah* together could have been influenced by the early Muslims watching the events in the Byzantine Empire. Furthermore, the possible heresy events in Byzantine Empire in the 5th Century could have influenced the reactions of Bedouin Tribes and their established authorities to Allah's revelation to the Prophet Muhammad. In turn, the Byzantine Empire's battle over heresies and the understanding that heresies could occur, could lend insight into why dueling spirit possession authorities exist within Islam.

Influence of The Byzantine Heresies on Islam

The Byzantine Empire did not truly arise as an influential power in the region until after the fall of Rome in 5th Century-- even though the Roman Emperor Constantine founded the Eastern Roman Empire, which became the Byzantine Empire, in 330 C.E. The Emperor Constantine introduced Christianity as the empire's predominant religion between 312 and 313 C.E., because Christianity and a vision of Christ

became influential in his success at the Battle of Milvian Bridge.²⁰⁸ The Emperor Constantine was entering into battle with a rival Emperor, Maxentius. The night before the battle, Constantine had a vision in his dream of the sign of the cross. This led Constantine to instruct all on the soldiers to put the cross on their shields and helmets. Constantine's force went into battle and they were successful. This event led to Constantine's conversion to Christianity and legalization of Christianity in the Roman Empire. In turn, this led Constantine to stop the persecution of Christians, and he gave the Christians their first formal and protected place to worship. Over time, Christianity took a political role in the Byzantine Empire through the Emperor becoming the protector of all Christians throughout the known world.

However, by 321 C.E., there were many disputes among Christians, and this theoretical dispute manifested itself publically, not just among Christian theologians. Christians were not all practicing the same religion: Christians in the eastern part of the empire were mainly Nestorian Christians and those in the western part were Byzantine orthodox Christians. A Christian theologian named Arius "denied the full divinity of Jesus Christ," and he and his followers created a Christian heresy.²⁰⁹ Arius taught in Alexandria and his beliefs led him to be denounced by the Byzantine orthodox Christian authorities. Arius and his followers were now kicked out of Christianity because of different interpretation of Christianity. The Byzantine example of allowing heresies to occur when its religion is breaking down into denominations only weakens the unity of the polity. It is possible that the early Muslim community learned from the experiences, and they realized it is better to try to create a unified creed and political structure that allows for different interpretations to occur instead of heresies.

Considering what happened during the rise of Islam in 7th Century, the excommunication of the Prophet Muhammad from this community because of his new beliefs and interpretation of the world around him probably helped shape the future Muslim community's idea that the community as whole should not be torn apart. As stated earlier, the *Ulama* feels it is important to keep the *Ummah*. One of the main reasons for their actions comes from that fact that the Prophet Muhammad recognized that

²⁰⁸ Aherne, C.M. and D Kelleher 2003: 474; Bruun, P. 1960: 361-370; MacGillivray Nicol, D. and J. L. Teall. Byzantine Empire. Encyclopedia Britannica Online: Accessed 1 May 2011.

²⁰⁹ ARIANISM, Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia, online: accessed on 11 May 2011

denominations were going to occur within Islam, and Dr. Gabriel F. Haddad's research further explains this. He states,

It was the task of these Friends of Allah in every age to repel from His Religion the harm of those who would hijack it by means of innovated beliefs and deviant doctrines, as we were warned that this would happen by the *hadith* of the Prophet (*saw*): " My Community shall divide into seventy-three sects, all of them in the Fire except one: those that cling to my *Sunna* and that of my rightly-guided successors after me." The division he spoke of is in the foundations of belief, not in the branches of the Law, since the latter was described by the authorities as a blessing. This struggle was explicitly mentioned in the *hadith*: " Verily, Allah has, for every innovation plotted against Islam, a Friend (*walee*) to defend it and say its proofs."²¹⁰

This quote is trying to explain that the devil can lead the rightly guided astray from Allah's rightly guided path for them. Many paths will be set in front of a Muslim, but it is the Muslims duty to stay on the right path. The Prophet Muhammad recognized that sects or denominations of Islam were going to occur, but the quote above warning society that the sects led by the devil are not the rightly guided ones. Sunan Abu-Dawud provides further understanding that Muhammad felt that *Ummah* was going to split up by stating, "Narrated AbuHurayrah: The Prophet (peace_be_upon_him) said: The Jews were split up into seventy-one or seventy-two sects; and the Christians were split up into seventy one or seventy-two sects; and my community will be split up into seventy-three sects."²¹¹ Furthermore, Haddad's quote reinforces the idea that the *Ummah* should stay together, especially with Haddad's statement that "all of them in the Fire except one: those that cling to my *Sunna* and that of my rightly-guided successors after me," since the *Ummah* will be held together by the rightly guided "learned."

However, the Prophet Muhammad could not tell the future, ensuring that he could not know that Islam was going to divide to two major sects with a variety of ways to determine what was a rightly-guided action. It is important to note that Muslims do not want to kick out members of the *Ummah*, and if they do have to excommunicate a member of society, something seriously has gone wrong, such as the member possesses a threat to society that it cannot contain, such as murder. Therefore, it is possible the events that occurred within the Byzantine Empire affected the development of this idea of future development of branch or denominations, such as the split between Sunni and Shi'a denominations.

²¹⁰ Haddad, G.F., As-Sunnah Foundation of America 2011; Accessed on Feb 2012

²¹¹ Sunan Abu-Dawud: Book 40, Number 4579

Influence of the Heresies on Spirit Possession

Even with the split between Sunni and Shi'a denominations and with the possible threat of heresies from spirit possession, since there is a possibility that possession could be considered by some as a way to talk to higher power. I.M. Lewis explains that "New faiths may announce their advent with a flourish of ecstatic revelations," which these "ecstatic revelations" could come through the possessed person's direct conversation to God.²¹² I.M. Lewis states that spirit possession can give the possessed person "a unique claim to direct experiential knowledge of the divine and, where this acknowledged by others, the authority to act as a privileged channel of communication between man and supernatural."²¹³ It is possible that *Ulama* noted the Christian heresies that probably led to the development of new Christian denominations and wanted to avoid creating heresies within Islam. I.M. Lewis states that many Christian authorities felt spirit possession was a threat to their authority, and as can be seen through his quote,

Orthodox Christianity has generally sought out to belittle mystical interpretation of trance where these were claimed by those who experienced them to represent Divine revelation. Thus though it is difficult to ignore the countless visions of Christian mystics, where the church has approved or honoured these ascetic figures it has other done so on other grounds. The sanction of heresy has proven a powerful deterrent in curtailing and discrediting wayward personal mystical experiences. Indeed, it is mainly in the context of trance states ascribed to the work of the Devil that we meet official ecclesiastical recognition of possession.²¹⁴

This belittlement has also occurred within Islamic spirit possession practices, as seen in Shaykh Muhammad Saalih al-Munajjid's statement about the practices that the spirit possession practitioners as being "devilish action, most of which is only achieved by means of shirk and drawing close to the jinn and shayaateen (devils)."²¹⁵ As seen, some within *Ulama* believe and view the spirit possession practitioners' *shirk* actions were the work of the devil.

However, as mentioned before, the *Ulama* do not excommunicate spirit possession practitioners; they only shun them for the use of the illicit actions in their practices, and still allow the spirit possession practitioners to deal with the *jinn*. Furthermore, the *Ulama* have to deal with spirit possession and they use

²¹² Lewis I.M. 1971: 29

²¹³ Lewis I.M. 1971: 15

²¹⁴ Lewis I.M. 1971: 39

²¹⁵ Islam QA: Ruling on Witchcraft, The Evil Eye and Destructive Envy: Accessed on Aug 2011

many modified spirit possession practitioner practices, such as the Islamic version of magical healing. In a way, it seems that the spirit possession practitioners' development of their magic healing texts around the Middle Ages and the fact the *Ulama* did not outright ban magical healing, in turn justifying their practice, preventing a heresy from occurring. The spirit possession practitioner's ability to justify their practices and the fact the Muslims are partaking in these frowned upon practices, whether licit or illicit, is another example that Islamic community does not want to throw members to the wayside and keeping the *Ummah* together is very important.

THE LASTING EFFECTS OF THE INFLUENCES ON ISLAMIC SPIRIT POSSESSION AUTHORITIES

With the advent of Islam and the period it took the *Ulama* to establish their rightful authority as the keepers of Islamic religious traditions, the *Ulama* influenced on spirit possession caused the tandem development and transformation of the *Kahins* into the modern day spirit possession practitioners. In turn, the spirit possession practitioner also influenced the *Ulama*'s understanding of spirit possession and their role within spirit possession practices. This tandem development of the two major categories of Islamic spirit possession authorities, *Ulama* and spirit possession practitioners, in association to the necessary evil *jinn*, in turn led to the develop of a variety of practices within spirit possession. These practices develop and changed over centuries through their changing roles and interpretations of world around them and the way society should act within that new worldview. Even though there are many other influences, not mentioned in this examination on Islamic spirit possession practices, Islam is component that directly or indirectly that has shaped Muslim society's believe in spirit possession, its practices and its spirit possession authorities through its development as a religion creating two tandem parallel spheres of authority.

Furthermore, these tandem parallel Islamic spirit possession authorities are direct or indirectly discussed in many anthropological or historical works examining the phenomenon of spirit possession. Lambek refers to the two spheres of authorities while discussing the Mayotte Muslims' ability to drink cologne during private occasions and public ceremonies, even though this practice is considered to be *haram* in Islam. Natvig refers to the two spheres of authorities while discussing Egyptian Zar Cult's

practice of pouring blood over the possessed host, even when that is also considered to be *haram* in Islam. Lastly, O'Brien refers to the two spheres of authorities while discussing the Northern Nigeria Islamic *rukiyya*'s view of spirit possession within society and why the *Ulama* must deal with it. As seen in Chapter 2, these tandem parallel authorities exist throughout the Muslim spirit possession world, and the authority choose whether they give into the illicit actions or not. Giving into the illicit actions, by many, is not considered to be completely wrong, because in turn giving into the illicit actions quiets the wildness and protects society as a whole. The historical development of the two authority spheres bring to light an interesting dynamic, that local and periphery Islamic spirit possession practices and views of Muslims on how to deal with the wild threat of the spirit on authority or society stems from a larger ever changing Islamic religious interpretation of what spirit possession is to society and its authority. This development of the tandem parallel spheres of Islamic spirit possession authorities have not stop changing, and modern influences are still shaping spirit possession, its practices and its spirit possession authorities. The major influence that now could affect Islamic spirit possession practices is the development of women being included in the *Ulama*.

The Future Shaping of Islamic Spirit Possession

When Islam formed Arabian Peninsula, many of the males gained important authority roles and many of the women did not even though women historically played significant roles within society. In addition, through the solidification of the *Ulama*, women became in many cases further removed from the religion that they practice, since they were banned from taking authority positions or even attending their local Mosque. Considering the fact that many of the pre-Islamic Bedouin practices became part of the Islamic practices and women were eventually shunned from their own religion, is it possible that women who had authority within the pre-Islamic community did not feel they should have to give up their roles? As women were shunned from their historic roles, including authority roles, women probably looked for other outlets and authority roles within their societies. History states that women were Bedouin *kahins*. With their historical authority role in mind, the fact that spirit possession practitioners seem to be mainly females, or the studies have a feminine tone, it is possible that women became or stay spirit possession practitioners.

While examining the available sources on Islamic spirit possession practices in association to its authorities, it become noticeable that it is possible that many of these women became the practitioners within spirit possession cults, to the point that women have seem to become dominant spirit possession practitioner. History presents support to the idea that these women partook and became spirit possession practitioners through statements that “illicit magic (at-tarikta al-madhmuna) to Iblis through his daughter or his son’s daughter, Baydakh.”²¹⁶ In addition, anthropological works predominantly speak of women becoming or being the spirit possession cult practitioners, as seen in Natvig, Krapf and other’s works, as discussed in Chapter 2. As Islam acknowledging the works of previous historians and anthropologists and the roles of *kahina* in pre-Islamic Arabia, it is highly likely that Islam began to shape and develop the modern interpretation of spirit possession practices and the practitioners’ authority roles within their societies. Muslim society’s shunning of women possibly led to development of women becoming within spirit possession practitioners.

Qur’anic Influences

Possibly one of the major influences for women to become the dominant authority among spirit practitioners seems to have derived from the Islamic textual tradition. The texts do not explicitly ban women from becoming religious authority figures, nor do they endorse women being practitioners of magical healing. In many studies examining the *Qur’an* and the statement associated with women’s authority roles, many scholars quote Marmaduke Pickthall’s translation of the *Qur’an*, which states, “Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other...”²¹⁷ This translation or interpretation is one of the main passages quoted by Islamic Sheiks when defining Muslims women’s roles within society. However, there are other translations of the *Qur’an*, like Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s, where the same passage, translated from Arabic, states,

Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them

²¹⁶ Savage-Smith, E. 2004: 92

²¹⁷ Qur’an 4:34

(lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance):
For Allah is Most High, great (above you all).²¹⁸

Differences of translations of the same passage within the *Qur'an* and the fact the Arabic language is contextual due to the language's written construction, allow wide latitude in how Muslims interpret such passages. Yet, such interpretations could have a huge affect on society's definitions of appropriate roles for women.

Further exploration into the Islamic textual tradition shows that there were no direct statement banning women from having authority roles within society. Many others have spent a considerable amount of time researching the role of women within Islamic societies, as seen in Ingrid Mattson and Hartford Seminary's article titled "Can a Woman be an Imam? Debating Form and Function in Muslim Women's Leadership." They clearly state the difficulty that is found in defining *Ulama*, by stating,

As is the case with many issues, however, the *Qur'an* gives only general guidelines, not details about the way Muslims should organize themselves and choose their leaders. Among the principles of leadership established in the *Qur'an* is the requirement that believers obey their leaders (4:59) and that leaders consult with their followers (42:38). The *Qur'an* describes leadership as a proper aspiration of the believing community (25:74), just as it describes Isaac and Jacob in particular, and the Children of Israel in general, as having been leaders (*a'imma*h—plural of *imam*) inspired by God to guide others (21:72-73). The *Qur'an* does not designate clear distinctions between political and religious leaders, and many of the prophets are shown to have exercised both spiritual and political authority.²¹⁹

With the *Qur'an* not making a formal distinction on whether men should hold the only authority within Islam, this probably allowed many of the female spirit possession practitioners the necessary leeway to gain authority roles within their societies.

In addition, the *Ulama* feel that magical healing, which is not always bad, is the same this as sorcery, even though the *Qur'an* does not forbid it. Considering the fact the *Qur'an* does not forbid magical healing, women spirit possession practitioners, within their societies, did not have to stop practicing and gave females more of a foundation to take on authority roles. Thus the development of the *Ulama's* belief that magical healing should only be conducted using the words Allah, as stated by the

²¹⁸ *Qur'an* 4:34

²¹⁹ Mattson, I. 2005: 1

Prophet Muhammad, and should not be anything else, since that would be considered sorcery. As stated in the *Qur'an*, *surah* 113 recognizes and confirms Muslims beliefs in sorcery through its statement,

Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak
From the evil of that which He created;
From the evil of the darkness when it is intense,
And from the evil of malignant witchcraft,
And from the evil of the envier when he envieth.²²⁰

With this in mind and the development of magical healing practices until the Middle Ages, the *Qur'an* does not prohibit magic. Nor does it prescribe any punishment for its practitioners. This *surah* only suggests that Muslims should stay away from “black magic” used by some. The development of magical healing being in many cases being considered the same as sorcery did not stop the spirit possession practitioners from using what they knew to cure the ill or stop them from gaining authority roles within their societies.

THE CHANGING MODERN ISLAMIC ULAMA

In modern Islamic society, women have begun to take a leadership role within the *Ulama*. Is the movement of these women into the religious authority a way of combating the roles of outside authorities, as seen in spirit possession? In modern spirit possession practices the authority role seems to have been gender dominated until 2006, when this male dominated authority started to officially accept females into their ranks. With this in mind, as seen in history and anthropology, the role of the *Ulama* has developed through spiritual leaders known as *shaykhs*, *imams*, *khatibs* (preachers), *Qur'an* reciters, *mu'adhdhins* (prayer callers), spiritual healers and others.²²¹ The majority of these leaders have been males, with only a few women playing a significant role. However, in many cases and societies, women do not have formally accepted religious leadership roles. Is it possible that the lack of women in formalized religious and leadership authority roles within many Islamic communities has led women to search out authority roles within their societies, such as authoritative roles within spirit possession cults? In addition, with the development of these competing authorities role within many of these Islamic communities, do orthodox Islamic authorities try to control ecstatic inspiration or the rise of outside/non-Islamic religious authorities

²²⁰ Qur'an: 113

²²¹ Mattson, I. 2005: 2

within their communities, since these inspirations or authorities pose a threat to the *Ulama*²²² Furthermore, has this threat to the *Ulama* led to women being accepted into formal religious leadership roles as a way to prevent development of religious denominations or “lose their ecstatic fervor?”²²³

Historical and anthropological research within the realm of Islamic spirit possession has presented that men and woman, in many cases, have taken different roles; with men typically being associated ecclesiastical authorities, and with women typically being associated as the practitioners of the many spirit possession cults. This can be seen in Susan O’Brien article titled *Spirit Discipline: Gender, Islam, and Hierarchies of Treatments in Postcolonial Northern Nigeria*, where the *rukiyya* (spirit exorcist) is a male; and the opposite can be seen in Janice Boddy’s article and Natvig’s article titled *Oromos, Slaves and the Zar Spirits: A Contribution to the History of the Zar Cult*, where they both talk about a female spirit possession practitioner. Considering the information gleaned from these studies, these studies present the fact that women have found an authority role in their communities.

These studies also present and discuss the fact that women have become spirit possession practitioners for many reasons. In Janice Boddy’s article titled *Spirits and Selves in Northern Sudan: The Cultural Therapeutics of Procession and Trance*, she states that women have used the spirit possession cult as a way to gain resources, attention, and authority within their societies. She also discusses that other views exist as an explanation of why spirit possession exist, and it could be a “biochemical reaction to nutritional deficiency.”²²⁴ Then, Messing states that spirit possession cult is the “catch-all for many psychological disturbances, ranging from frustrated status ambition to actual mental illness.”²²⁵ No possessed victim is cured or discharged from the cult. The cult functions as a therapy group and the new cult members become devotees in which they join a close-knit secured social group. The cult is highly organized, but the cult is not abnormal, “its significance in maintaining the status quo in society has traditionally been greater than improvement of social status.” He continues by stating the *zar* spirit can

²²² Lewis, I.M. 1971: 15 & 156

²²³ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 156

²²⁴ Boddy, J. 2002: 2

²²⁵ Messing, S. 2009: 1125

help the possessed victim carry a normal social role within society, and the *zar* spirit can give the victim a “desire for upward social mobility” to escape their confinements.²²⁶

In addition, as I.M. Lewis stated that spirit possession can possibly give the possessed person a unique and privileged connection between man and supernatural, and an ability to talk to God could be considered a great ability and a threat within any established religion, even within Islam.²²⁷ As seen above, these studies have presented many possible reasons why women become spirit possession practitioners, but these might not be only reasons or all of the reason why women become spirit possession practitioners. Nevertheless, as seen with the examination of the authorities within Islamic spirit possession, the development of women being spirit possession practitioners existed before the development of Islam, and it is possible that development of the modern-day women spirit possession cult practitioner took centuries to form. The practice of being a spirit possession practitioner could cross generations of women, whether through family lineage or apprenticeship, and women are choosing to join the cults and to become practitioners due to prestige the practitioner hold within their societies as the curer of illness and misbehavior. Considering this, as new women join the cult or become practitioners for monetary gain, resources, attention, prestige, and/or authority, the women who are becoming practitioners are becoming a part of a long standing tradition, which their environment, history and interpretation of their worldview have shaped their modern existence with society.

Now, considering the movement within Islam that is incorporating women into the Islamic ecclesiastical authorities, it is possible that women becoming part of the Islamic ecclesiastical authorities as way to stop inappropriate behavior associated with illicit practices, probably such as spirit possession practices, as a way to combat a perceived threat toward the Islamic worldview and its authority. By allowing women another path to monetary gain, resources, attention, prestige, and/or authority, Muslim women might be less likely to participate in illicit acts or join groups that condone the illicit acts. This could be a reason for the major change in Islamic ecclesiastical authorities’ view of women with their hierarchical system. This change of Islamic hierarchy might become another way of combating the illicit

²²⁶ Messing, S. 2009: 1124

²²⁷ Lewis, I.M. 1971: 15

actions since the women are being influenced to ecclesiastical authorities' interpretation of the Islamic worldview.

Over time, as these ecclesiastical women join societies inside and outside periphery, this change in women's roles within society could threaten the modern female spirit possession practitioner very existence in society. In addition, this addition of women into the ecclesiastical authorities could just add a layer to the complexity to Islamic practices, which could further shape Islamic spirit possession. Furthermore, continued research into the development of these ecclesiastical women is necessary to identify the effect, if any, that they will have on Islamic society or on pre-existing female-dominated authority roles. But as of 2011, these ecclesiastical women will begin to combat the same illicit actions as their male counterparts and they will begin to define their roles with society.

IV. CONCLUDING & SHAPING FUTURE ISLAMIC SPIRIT POSSESSION RESEARCH

As seen in the aforementioned chapters, there are various ways to deal or treat spirit possession within Islam; and the tandem development of two unique authorities and their interpretations of the textual tradition and the world around them has led to the development of parallel spirit possession traditions. Furthermore, the examination of these varying and sometimes disparate local spirit possession practices might give the impression that Islamic spirit possession practices developed as local variations or popular religious practices with no overarching connections to other regions of the Islamic world. However, the common assumption that many of the practices are an amalgam local or popular religious developments, as reinforced by Geertz's work with Islamic communities, doesn't explain why there are striking similarities found within all of these localized or popular religious traditions. So, why do we observe numerous local variations in Islamic ritual actions that give rise to variations in the ways Muslims collectively decide to deal with spirit possession, when all Muslims define their belief through a shared common foundation in this textual tradition, as found in the *Qur'an*?

The first part of the answer to this question lies in fact that there is an underlying unity separate from the textual/Ulama interpretation in all of these varied local practices found throughout Africa and the Middle East. The ways in which Muslims, in relation to their interpretations of textual tradition, collectively decide to deal with problems within their society are reflections of Islam and the boundaries that Islam itself deems acceptable. This boundary is not black or white, but it contains many shades of gray. If orthodox Islam is all that exists within these boundaries, and unbelief all that lies beyond it, then spirit possession represents one of the many shades of gray that affects members of these communities. This idea then suggests when different Muslim societies' interpretations of this textual tradition differ, Islam itself is the component that has both directly and indirectly shaped Muslim society's beliefs, such as spirit possession, its practices and the role of its spirit possession authorities.

Furthermore, Islam and the boundaries that Islam itself defines as acceptable have allowed for the tandem development of two distinct Islamic spirit possession authorities through their push-and-pull with one another's interpretation of the textual tradition, the supernatural, and world around them. This push-and-pull between orthodox Islamic authorities and spirit possession practitioners has also led to the development of parallel spirit possession ritual actions that vary from community to community because they have developed in relation to their authority's interpretation of the larger Islamic worldview. The chain of circumstances between these authorities and their actions shaped and modified the development of the other, eventually leading to what can be observed in modern spirit possession ritual actions.

Secondly, the impact of the push-and-pull both of these authorities has also given rise to multiple religiously-inspired responses to societies' problems and a variety of ritual acts to combat any threat to authority by the possessed host. Bearing this in mind, the opposition between good/appropriate and bad/illicit actions has also supported the development variations in spirit possession practices/rituals as a means to deal with the illicit actions and threat posed by spirit possession. This opposition between appropriate and illicit actions also represents a dynamic that emerged because it was both necessary for the development of modern spirit possession practices and for the growth of practitioners'/*Ulama's* interpretations of spirit possession. Society's understanding of the effects of spirit possession/illness on the host, and appropriate authority or practice to deal with spirit possession, in relation to the society's understanding and interpretation of the textual tradition, has led to the development of the varied spirit possession practices that anthropologists have observed throughout the Islamic world.

With these ideas in mind, it seems that the aspects of worldview associated with spirit possession, and the authorities associated with spirit possession societies, are not something outside of or alien to the greater Islamic worldview. Although it is *shirk*, these illicit practices are shaped by, and inseparable from, the orthodox beliefs and practices of Islam. Furthermore, while the *Ulama* want nothing to do with these spirits, they nonetheless have to acknowledge that spirits are part of existence, and must be dealt with in one way or another. Hence, the realm of spirit possession represents *shirk*, the world outside the bounds of Islam and God's grace. But, someone has to deal with that which lies beyond its pale.

TANDEM DEVELOPMENT STILL EQUALS POPULAR RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCES

During this examination of Islamic spirit possession and its complexities, the question was posed “wouldn’t Islamic spirit possession practice be considered popular religious experience, especially in reference to women becoming the dominant authority in spirit possession cults?” But as seen with the examination of the complexities of Islamic spirit possession, its authorities, and variety of spirit possession practices, there is not a simple yes or no answer to this question. Many historians feel that shunning of women from mainstream Islamic practices led them to search for new outlets of practice. Many of these outlets for women came through development of local and popular Islamic religion practices. However, these studies suggest that popular religious experiences have no structure, authority, or are merely “local arrangements.”²²⁸ Furthermore, a study conducted for the Library of Congress, Helen Chapin Metz’s examination of Egypt, explains that popular religion within Islam, which is mostly based on oral traditions, includes a variety of unorthodox practice such as veneration of saints and tomb worship. The authorities within these popular religious practices have “virtually no formal education, they commonly memorize the entire Qur’an, and recite appropriate verses on religious occasions.”²²⁹ Lastly, Metz explains that these can “range from informal prayer sessions or Qur’an studies to organized cults or orders.” Considering her definition of popular religious practices, then spirit possession, generally, could be considered to be a popular religious practice; however, as seen in the aforementioned examination of spirit possession, it has two dueling authorities structures with one of them being the Ulama itself, so spirit possession does not exactly fit into the concept of popular religious experience as she defines it.

So why does spirit possession not fit within this definition of popular religion or popular religious experience? The two Islamic spirit possession authorities have structures, and whether closely or loosely organized, each are facets of the larger structure of the textual tradition and the religion of Islam itself. The structure of the Ulama has a clearly defined hierarchical structure; however, the spirit possession cults have a loosely defined local structure. As seen in the examination of Islamic spirit possession, the spirit possession cults all have a practitioner and sometimes the practitioner has assistants. Yet spirit possession

²²⁸ Hammami, R.E. 1994: 72 & 77

²²⁹ Metz, H.C. 1990: Accessed on Jan 2012

is not just a phenomenon of local arrangements. History has shown that spirit possession existed before the emergence of Islam, and its development was tandem to the development of orthodox Islamic practices. Furthermore, even with Islam having a codified textual tradition, Islam does not have a single codified authority figure. Islam has a number of authority figures that all differ in their interpretation of the textual tradition, leading to a variety of orthodox practices. Then spirit possession practitioners throughout the Islamic world have a variety of practices that in turn have been affected by the numerous variations in Islamic orthodox interpretations, allowing spirit possession practices to be shaped to fit their society's construct of the world around them. This tandem development did not just occur in a local area, but it occurred all over the Islamic world. The development of two spheres of authority within spirit possession practices leads to the fact that spirit possession really does not fit the current definition of a popular religious experience or practice-- it is something more. Or, are popular religious experiences really another larger, more encompassing example of the tandem development that occurred in Islam? And perhaps there is a possibility that the definition of popular religious practice needs to be redefined.

With this in mind, it seems that popular religious experiences and practices are another extension of same tandem development that occurred with spirit possession, since popular religious experiences and practices have also developed in tandem to orthodox Islamic practices. Muslims, whether they partake in orthodox Islamic or popular religious practices, are affected by their interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim with reference to their understanding of Islam and its textual tradition. Islam itself is the component that has directly and indirectly shaped Muslim society's beliefs and practices. Whether or not practices like veneration of saints, tomb-worshiping, spirit possession, etc. run a fine line between the licit and illicit, they still occur. Some of these are widespread practices throughout the Islamic world, and many Muslims feel these practices are *shirk* due to fact they are not worshiping Allah or Allah alone. However, the participants of these practices do not feel they are un-Islamic, and orthodox Muslims have only shunned these practices, in turn allowing them to still occur. In a way, these illicit practices occur as a way to lessen the threat toward their authority and society, and allow the *Ummah* to remain complete, since they believe Allah will be the final judge of their actions. Furthermore, popular religious experiences and

practices are also part of the larger authority structure of Islam, whether they develop only in a local area or represent widespread practices throughout the Islamic world. After all, popular religious experiences and practices develop new interpretations of Islam and the way it should be practiced in association with orthodox Islamic practices.

Whether Islamic spirit possession and its practices are considered a popular religious expression or not, Islamic spirit possession needs to be considered a facet of the larger Islamic worldview. The many different variations in practice found throughout the Islamic world represent their local communities' understanding of the Islamic textual tradition, what is right or wrong, their history, environment and worldview. Through their authority and society's negotiation of what is licit and illicit, a variety of practices have developed in tandem with their understanding of orthodox Islam and its practices. The local communities feel that they are still part of the larger *Ummah*, even if they are shunned by it, because their interpretation and understanding of Islam, what it means to be a Muslim and the world around them has led them to develop practices, licit or not, to deal with their problems. This, in turn, allows society to fully worship Allah, even when illicit practices are used, since the illicit serves as a protection device from a larger threat of spirit wildness and possibly of the *Ummah* being torn apart. Furthermore, whether women or men are the sources of society's authority or protection, they are both part of the larger community, and it is every Muslim's duty to protect the oneness of Allah, even if the gender situation within Islamic authority has a manmade complexity. Considering this, spirit possession is a great example of how such differences could give rise to variations in ritual actions and in the ways in which Muslims collectively decide to deal with problems within their society.

Moreover, it is possible that all popular Islamic traditions and practices are facets of the tandem development of Islam and its practices, due to the fact that a society's interpretation of Islam has probably shaped why the society has chosen to practice in the way it does. This practice might be only a local tradition or it could be widespread throughout the Islamic world, but Islam affects, directly and indirectly, their understanding of the world around them as they negotiate the licit and illicit demands on every Muslim. This negotiation of the licit and illicit, with reference to their understanding of the Islamic textual

tradition, might lead to new interpretations of what it means to be a Muslim. Coupling this negotiation of the licit and illicit with the *Ummah's* desire not to break apart, is a reason why popular Islamic traditions and practices, with all their variation in complexity, exist within a complex community founded in the same textual tradition. So, the development of spirit possession authorities and its practices and popular Islamic traditions and practices are a reflection of the larger development of Islam itself.

THE NEVER ENDING CHANGING DYNAMIC OF ISLAM AND ITS FUTURE STUDIES

Islam has not stopped the process of defining itself within a world that is also changing. The aforementioned examination of Islamic spirit possession is one example of the complexity found within Islam. The variations within Islamic practices are affected by the Muslim society's changing interpretation and understanding of Islamic textual tradition, extra-textual local traditions, pre-Islamic practices and beliefs, locally determined social class structures, and political environments. As seen with this examination and comparison of anthropological and historical evidence, a hidden narrative about spirit possession, its practices and transformation emerged. Spirit possession represents a type of parallel tradition, whose practices and authority have developed in tandem with orthodox Islamic practice. It appears that within a general Islamic worldview, spirit possession is a necessary part of the wider universe and people must deal with it in one way or another. These coexisting, sometimes dueling, but tandemly developing spirit possession authorities have transformed and shaped the Islamic spirit possession societies through the authorities' interpretation of the larger boundaries of the Islamic worldview.

Additionally, this tandem development has not ceased throughout the formation of modern-day spirit possession beliefs and practices, since pre-Islamic and early Islamic practices have been modified to fit within contemporary societies' defined religious global worldview. As women join the *Ulama*, it is highly likely that the Islamic worldview associated with spirit possession will change. As the Islamic world changes, spirit possession, along with other practices, will change. To understand fully the effect of this change on the Islamic community and their interpretation of the Islamic textual tradition and worldview, it is necessary to examine the changing situation through a multidisciplinary approach that can

present new insights into the development of local variations within Islamic practices, religious concepts of *tawhid* and *shirk*, and the Muslim worldview, whether associated spirit possession practice or not.

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